





FRIEND OR FORTUNE?

FRIEND OR FORTUNE

A STORY FOR BOYS

BY

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WITH PICTURES BY

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FRIEND OR FORTUNE

CHAPTER I.

THE SITUATION.

“THE situation is getting strained, Rafe,” said Harry Saxon, my cousin and my chum.

“So much so,” I replied, “that something’s bound to go snap before long.”

Briefly, the “situation” under discussion was this—

Harry Saxon and I—Ralph Towers—were orphans. Until our parents died (his father and mother within a few weeks of my father and my mother) we had seen little of each other. But since that sad time, six years ago, we had never been parted, for we had been at the same boarding-school. Having nowhere else to go, our vacations were spent there as well as term-times.

The only living relative of whom we had any knowledge—our uncle, Major Bengough, of Bombay—had, we understood, undertaken to pay for

both of us. He was the brother of Harry's dead mother and of mine. We knew little else about him. He never wrote to us, never sent us any message, any word of greeting, through the London solicitor who appeared to act as his agent, and through whom his remittances for our school bills were received by Dr. Job Consett, the principal of the Beechy Bay Academy for Young Gentlemen.

For more than five years the Major had sent these remittances with military regularity and punctuality. But for two whole terms, and the greater part of a third term, nothing had been received from him. Of this fact Consett himself, with harsh voice and black brows, had not hesitated to inform us.

"Old Consett cares for money," Harry Saxon had said, "more than he cares for anything else in this world—or the next. If somebody doesn't pay up, what will he do, and what shall we have to do?"

That was just the *crux* of the situation, and the particular point in which Harry and I had been specially discussing in the hamper-shed after morning school on the day on which these veracious chronicles have their beginning.

Our conversation was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door, and the thrusting into view of the merry face and the exceedingly curly head of Walter Locks, the playground monitor.

“Here, I say, you fellows, I don’t know what you’re in for, but ‘The Patient One’ is waiting for you in the sanctum, and you’re both to go in to him at once.”

“All right, Curly. What does he look like?”

“A double dose, Harry, with a little bit to spare for next time”—and the merry face and curly head disappeared.

The genesis of the sobriquet of “The Patient One” for Dr. Job Consett was in this wise: Some brilliant wit suggested “The Patient” as an agreeable variation of “The Doctor.” This suggestion was evidently improved upon by an even more brilliant wit dubbing our anything but esteemed pedagogue, “The Patient One,” in pointed allusion to his lack of patience and to his Christian name.

“We ought to make the most of his Christian name,” this genius had remarked; “it’s the only Christian thing about him.”

And looking back even now—in the days when an ex-schoolboy is disposed to think kindly of those whom he judged less charitably in early days—I honestly believe that boy spoke the truth.

Harry and I looked at each other.

“The situation is about to snap,” said I.

“Let it snap,” returned Harry, recklessly and curtly—though he linked his arm in mine affectionately, as much as to add, “Whatever’s before us, we’ll face it together,” as off we walked with

silent tongues but beating hearts to learn the worst.

Through the playground into the school-house, along the passages towards the Doctor's dreaded study.

He was waiting for us—a spare little man, whose face a physiognomist would have found a good deal of fault with. He would have said that the small, closely set eyes were cunning ones; that the long upper lip indicated avariciousness; that the whole expression of his face was a shifty one.

However avaricious he may have been, it was an open secret in the school that he hadn't acquired much. The elder boys used to say that, in his haste to be rich, what he made he lost by rash dabbling in stocks and shares which had a habit of falling in value as soon as he possessed them.

In the thin, grating voice we knew so well, he came to the point without any preliminary parley.

“Well, young gentlemen,” he said—his habit of sarcastic politeness was a seldom-failing irritant—“I have some interesting news for you. Being still without money—money for your education, your board, and the very clothes you wear—I wrote at last to Mr. Dexton, your benevolent uncle's agent in London, demanding an explanation. I had asked for one several times without getting it—now I've got it, such as it is. After

sheltering himself, for not having told me before, behind the excuse of his principal's instructions to be silent, he has condescended to inform me that nine months ago Major Bengough advised him that he was returning to England on board the *Eastern Star*. In fact, he wrote from on board her at Bombay, and was to sail the next day or the day after."

"That was nine months ago, sir!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes, sir; nine months almost to the day."

"Did he—did uncle say anything about us, sir?" I faltered.

"Simply that he would inspect you—these are his own words, mark you—and make such arrangements as he thought proper about your future, upon his arrival. But he hasn't arrived, and nothing whatever has been heard of the *Eastern Star* from the day she sailed, nine months ago. Nine months' education, board, clothing, religious training, books, and extras, all owing to me—to say nothing of kindness, special anxiety, and individual attention!"

Harry's face flushed.

"Won't Mr. Dexton pay you, Dr. Consett?"

"Mr. Dexton has no funds to pay me from, and no instructions to pay me if he had the funds—and no wish to pay me if he had both," added the patient Job, viciously. "There's his letter," he continued, grabbing hold of a paper

before him and flinging it across the table. "Read it."

Harry Saxon and I read the lawyer's communication together. It was brief and succinct. The news it contained had been retailed to us without palliation or exaggeration. Annexed to it was a copy of Uncle Bengough's own short letter.

"The *Eastern Star* is a sailing vessel, mark you," resumed Dr. Consett as we returned him the letter. "If this Major Bengough had been a man of proper character, he would have come by the steamer that carried his precious note, and would have brought my money with him, instead of taking a later passage by a sailing-ship and getting drowned in my debt. As it is, here you are, you two, with the largest appetites in the school, but without a friend or relation in the world who can pay me."

I noticed that Harry's brown eyes, so gentle as a rule, began to glitter dangerously. But I got in before him with—

"Surely, sir, if . . . if uncle is not heard of again it'll be somebody's duty to pay you out of what he may have left behind him."

"If he had anything to leave behind him, do you think his solicitor would write like that?"

Consett pointed with an angry gesture to Mr. Dexton's letter.

"Would his own solicitor disclaim responsi-

bility if there were any money to be responsible with? Bah!"

Harry's eyes were blazing now. He drew himself up as he cried hotly—

"We'll pay you ourselves!"

"Yes," I joined in—I was a capital hand at joining in—"we'll pay you ourselves!"

Job Consett didn't laugh—he never did; I don't believe he had ever honestly laughed in all the fifty years of his life—but his thin lips parted in the nearest approach to a smile he ever indulged in.

"I shall be happy to give you a receipt."

"So you shall give us a receipt one of these days."

"And in the mean time, Master Saxon, I propose to take care that the amount is not increased. In six days' time—on the 28th of July—we break up. If I have not been paid by then—and who is there to pay me?—instead of spending the vacation with me as usual, you will both go with the other boys."

"Go where, sir?" asked Harry.

"Wherever you like, so long as you don't come back."

"What are we to do, sir?" was the question I vainly struggled to repress.

"Whatever you like, so long as you never come back. I won't seek to influence you in any way. Shift for yourselves. For the six days

between now and the twenty-eighth—almost a week—I will continue to keep you. But I trust to your honor not to eat more than you can help.”

If it cost me an effort to control my feelings, what must it have cost my high-spirited cousin? An outbreak of indignant words trembled on his lips; I even saw that he doubled those strong fists of his.

I nudged him with my elbow, and tossed back my head towards the door, to which we both stalked off without a word. But at the door Harry turned, and looked Dr. Job Consett square in the face. There was no mistaking the double meaning of the short sentence he shot out at the Head Master of Beechy Bay Academy for Young Gentlemen before he closed that door behind him—

“One of these days, Dr. Consett, *we'll pay you!*”

CHAPTER II.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

THE situation had snapped, for Consett, its master, had spoken. We were face to face now with the actualities of a new one, which, though anticipated, was so fraught with perplexities, so beset with difficulties, that it is no wonder both Harry and I found ourselves on the punishment-list that afternoon for inattention and "gross carelessness." The only part of our punishment we troubled about was its accidental side: it made it impossible for us to be alone to discuss our plans until the long hot summer day had waned into evening.

Then—ignoring without a single pang of conscience the rule which would have confined us within bounds—we made off together for the beach, the strip of golden sand which we loved better than any other spot in Beechy Bay. For the fishermen were all chums of ours: there wasn't one of them who didn't make us free of his boat, and it was from this favorite spot of ours they had taught us to put out fearlessly to sea—taught

us to swim, to row, to sail. We had gone with some of them as far as Start Point on one side, and Portland Bill on the other; for it was between the two that lay the little town I will continue to call Beechy Bay. As a matter of fact, it was so called by the local rustics.

And just beyond where the sands ended in a rugged, ragged, jagged, bristling line of rocks and crags, we had our own cave, into which we fondly believed few but ourselves knew the tortuous way. Besides, scarcely a mile from this part of the shore, to the left of the projecting headland that ran seaward beyond it, was Bay Island. And what a glorious place at low tide was Bay Island! What hours Harry and I used to spend there, collaring the first idle boat we came to! What fishing and harpooning in its salt pools we enjoyed! What Natural history collecting, chiefly of live (and unfortunate) specimens for Harry's "museum," as he called a zinc-lined box which, with the connivance of a good-natured housemaid, he kept under his bed in the big dormitory!

We sat with our backs against an upturned smack. The southerly wind blew sweet and fresh in our faces, cooling the pine-scented air. The blue sky hung low over a bluer sea, athwart which began to stream the white track of the moonlight. "What were we to do?" was all we talked about.

"It's the suspense — the uncertainty — that makes it all so hard to tackle," said Harry. "If

we knew that uncle was alive—well, little as we really know about him, we know what he said in that letter: that he'd inspect us, and make arrangements about our future. That's indefinite, but still it's something to hang on by—or would be. On the other hand, if we knew for certain that he was dead——”

“Well?” said I, for he hesitated.

“Why, we'd clear away from Old Consett's tomorrow, that's certain. What we'd have to do afterwards is——”

“Is as certain as the fate of Uncle Bengough is, at present.”

“His fate may be uncertain for long enough yet.”

“But not ours, Harry—that's to be decided, at least up to a certain big point, by the twenty-eighth.”

“So it is. I say, old man,” he interjected after a pause of silence, “the wind's freshening.”

“Yes,” I agreed; “it's been getting up for a quarter of an hour past. And look there—just the other side of the island—here's one of the boats running in before it. It's Dan Runciman's, I think,” I continued, as I caught a fuller view of the bellying brown sails.

We rose and walked to the water's edge. The boat sailed so rapidly that we soon satisfied ourselves that it was our old friend Dan's. We sent a hail across the water, and Dan's own voice answered it.

If we were to be back in time for the last roll-call we ought to have returned at once; but we were just in the mood to risk anything, and we agreed to wait to lend a hand in beaching the approaching *Curlew*.

She wasn't long in getting in. Down came her sails with a run as she touched ground. Out sprang Dan and his son Joe. To the former's cheery "Heave-heave-ho-o!" they and Harry and I hauled her up.

"A poor catch, Dan," said Harry, with a glance at the few fish at the bottom of the boat.

"Aye, poor enough, sir," responded old Dan.

With a mysterious look on his honest, brown-red face, he went on.

"But we've fished up something I never caught before."

Leaning over the gunwale of his little craft, he opened the locker and brought out—if I may use such a phrase—a weather-beaten looking bottle, tightly corked, and further secured at the opening by what looked like a complicated arrangement of wirework.

Holding the bottle in his hands, Dan said—

"We found this bobbing round our bows, just as though it was asking for to be took aboard. I says to Joe as I catches hold of it, 'Joe,' I says, 'this here bottle do look like what the papers call a "Message from the Sea."'" And so it do, young gentlemen, so it do."

We looked at the bottle with interest.

"It's lucky you're here," reflected Dan; "for if so be as there's anything in it of the sort I'm thinking, it'll be a wrote message, and you'll be able to read a wrote message better than me and Joe. Print's more in our line."

"Open it, Dan!" we cried.

Dan raised the mysterious-looking bottle, and broke the neck on the *Curlew's* gunwale.

Our excitement increased as he drew out of it and handed to Harry what looked like a folded leaf from a pocket-book.

With eager fingers Harry unfolded the slip of paper.

Looking over his shoulder in the moonlight, my hands and lips trembled with his as together we read this message from the dead, written in large, clear characters on the widely-lined page. Somehow, the letters conveyed the idea that it was the lost ship they came from that quivered as they were written, not the hand that wrote them.

Supplemented by details of latitude and longitude, these were the words of the message:—

"Midnight, January 1st, 188—.

"The 'Eastern Star' is sinking, with all on board.

"GABRIEL BENGOUGH."

CHAPTER III.

AN AUCTION IN THE BIG DORMITORY.

OUR agitation was too great to escape notice. Old Dan and his son—a brawny young fisherman only some five or six years our senior—regarded us with looks of amazement.

“What be it, sirs?” cried the former.

Harry slowly read the message aloud, and turned to me with a look of inquiry which I answered with a nod. Then he told our two honest-hearted humble friends what the message meant to himself and to me. Almost everybody in the place knew why it was that we always spent our holidays at school instead of going home like the other boys—Dan and Joe were certainly no strangers to the fact that it was because we had no home to go to. They knew from ourselves all that we had ever known about our uncle Gabriel—so a very few words sufficed to make them understand what the definite news of the loss of the *Eastern Star* with Major Bengough on board meant after the ultimatum that had been delivered to us that morning.

That must be our last night at Beechy Bay—to-morrow morning we must pack up the few things belonging to us and go—where?

“We won’t eat the bread of charity from *his* table, Rafe, anyway,” said Harry in a rather choky voice.

“No, old chap—we’ll starve first.”

Dan and Joe said very little, but as they walked up the beach with us towards the school gates a weight seemed to be on the mind of each. Perhaps it was just this weight on their minds that kept their tongues so silent.

“Good-night, Dan—and good-bye.”

With similar words I offered my hand to Joe, as Harry extended his to Joe’s father.

“Good-night, sir, and good-night, Master Rafe—but not good-bye yet. We shall be sort of standing by to-morrow all day—p’raps two pairs o’ willing hands might come in useful in the matter o’ boxes, and so on.”

“All we have, Dan, I’m afraid we shall be able to carry ourselves,” said Harry with a laugh in which there was very little mirth. “But we’ll look out for you before we go, all the same.”

That weight wasn’t off Dan’s mind yet.

“Look ’ee here, Master Harry, and likewise Master Rafe equally,” he got out at last with an obvious effort, “seeing as how as I knows what I knows—which the same is what you’ve told me—what I would respeckful mean to say is as how there *is* a home open and free though humble

enough, and the same"—pointing a huge red finger towards his own cottage—"is *there* ! Also, likewise, if a rough and tumble substitoot for a father might be wanted any time—or a uncle—why, he's *here* ! ”

And the red finger touched his broad chest. “ And if a rougher and tumbler substitoot for a brother might any time come in handy,” burst in Joe, who was apt to get a little “ mixed ” when excited, “ he's here-er ! ”

I don't see why I should be ashamed to record that my eyes were not any more above suspicion than Harry's were, as again we shook the hard hands of these rough chums of ours, and bolted off from the other side of the gates. We felt that it wouldn't be quite safe for us to try any speechifying on, even by way of thanks. Speechifying doesn't agree well with lumps in the throat.

We were too late for roll-call, but found that Curly Locks, who had lately been studying and practising ventriloquism, had seized the opportunity of proving the practical value of the art, and his own proficiency in it, by answering to our names, to the intense admiration of the whole school.

Curly was not only monitor of the playground, but of the big dormitory. Before we twenty who slept there filed upstairs, Harry and I had a chat with him ; and he constituted himself the conductor of the subsequent proceedings.

These proceedings were more or less lively. They began soon after the under-master had passed through the different bedrooms to make sure that all lights were out. A naked-footed and night-shirted scout was sent out to summon the occupants of the smaller apartments to a grand palaver in the big one.

As soon as they had assembled, Walter Locks cautiously lit a piece of candle and stuck it into the neck of an empty ginger-beer bottle. Sitting bolt upright at the head of his bed, he proceeded to unburden his soul. He went at some length (for he was very fond of talking) into the circumstances under which Harry and I were about to leave and to face the great unknown "world" for ourselves. With breathless interest our school-mates listened to his account of what had occurred only an hour or two ago; from hand to hand passed the message from the sinking *Eastern Star*.

The monitor said that we were leaving behind us a reputation of which that school would always be proud.

"No, no," we murmured modestly.

"Yes, yes," insisted Curly firmly. He would deal first with Harry Saxon. Was there a boy in that room who didn't remember, or who hadn't heard of, Jim Bloggs, the pork-butcher's assistant? Hadn't the name of Bloggs been a terror, term after term—for hadn't Bloggs licked our chosen

champions one after the other? Who was it who finally plugged Bloggs in the eye, and left him on the field of battle in such a disabled condition that he had to crawl out of it into a bed of sickness for a fortnight? It was Harry Saxon. (Smothered cheers.)

The first eleven would miss him sorely; it would be long before his place could be filled in the football team. If another Bloggs should arise, he trembled for the good name of the school with Harry Saxon's fist shining in some other sphere of life.

He was not going to deny that there was a blot in Harry Saxon's character. For there was one. It was his museum. He denied the right of any boy to keep a lot of beastly reptiles and other live things, crawling or otherwise, in a box under his bed, as experience had proved that it was impossible to prevent the frequent escape of adventurous specimens which were obviously—and, he considered, not unreasonably—dissatisfied with the accommodation of that box. He himself, though a strict teetotaler, had upon no fewer than seven occasions found green snakes in his bed, and there could be no doubt where they came from. However, was there not a snake in Paradise? He believed that if Harry Saxon would struggle against snakes he would get on in the world.

And that brought him to the point. Harry

Saxon and Rafe Towers had found, upon the very eve of their departure, that their united available capital amounted to one shilling and eleven pence. This was a small sum to start life on their own account with. It must be augmented. With this end in view, he was about to conduct a public auction, at their own request, of their effects, or such of them as they felt it would be out of place to take into the world with them.

After some further remarks, he said that he would start with the beastly museum he had already referred to, and hastened to state at once that he had wrung a reluctant consent from its present owner to the following condition of sale: the fellow who bought it was at liberty to kill the specimens and smash up the box. He would start the bidding himself at seven and sixpence. Would nobody bid more than seven and sixpence? Then he'd say ten shillings, and, with a bang of his fist on the pillow to represent the fall of the hammer, "The museum's mine."

Lot No. 2 was my cricket-bat—I'd won it the previous season with the second eleven for the best match-score average.

"Now, what shall we say for this prime bat?" demanded Curly. "You see, they've decided to go to London first to see this solicitor chap for themselves, and the fares are stiff—awfully stiff. So what shall we start this fine bat at?"

The fellows saw through Locks's dodge at once.

Competition was keen for the bat and the few other articles that followed it. They were all "knocked down" at fancy prices.

"The sale has realized," announced the auctioneer at last, running his eye down the figures pencilled on the cuff of his night-gown—"the sale has realized three pounds nineteen."

"That's all very well, Curly," remarked the voice of one of the highest bidders, "but what about stumping up the money? It's the end of the term, and we're all hard up. I don't believe we've got even the nineteen shillings between the whole lot of us!"

A hurried consultation resulted in the establishment of this painful surmise as a still more painful fact. Every bidder had relied upon borrowing from some other bidder.

But the auctioneer was equal even to this emergency.

"I'd thought of this," he said, "and it's all right. My godfather sent me a fiver only yesterday, to spend during the vacation—I haven't broken into it yet. I sympathize with my godfather very much, but I shall have to tap him for another fiver. So I shall pay up for everybody. I shall hand Harry and Rafe their three pounds and nineteen bob entire, and all you chaps who've been bidding will have to settle up with me for your different lots when you come back after the holidays."

“Bravo, Curly!” “You’re a brick!” “Curly forever!” broke out on all hands; but the manifestation of feeling was sternly repressed by Curly himself.

“Back to your rooms, all you outside fellows,” he ordered, “and into bed, everybody. The sale’s over, and the candle’s going out.”

A quarter of an hour afterwards, when we thought everybody in the big dormitory but ourselves was fast asleep, a white-robed apparition crept between Harry’s bed and mine, and slipped into Harry’s hand something that crackled.

“Three pounds nineteen bob,” whispered the apparition, gliding away.

“Here, Curly, stop,” said Harry, trying to grab the disappearing tail of the apparition’s fluttering night-shirt. “Stop! this is a five-pound note, and we’ve no change.”

“Shut up, can’t you! If you say ‘change’ again, not to speak of what I’ll do if you offer it me,” cried the apparition, savagely, in a hoarse whisper, “I’ll punch the heads of the pair of you!”

CHAPTER IV.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

THE next morning, soon after breakfast, we sent our names in to the Doctor for an interview. He granted us one at once.

"Well," he said sharply, as we entered his room, "what is it you want with me? If I'd had any further news, I should have sent for you. I have no news for you of any sort."

"But we have some for you, sir," said Harry.

"Eh? What? *You* have news for *me*?"

"Yes. The *Eastern Star* sunk nearly seven months ago, with Major Bengough on board. We have news of our uncle's death at sea; so, after what you said to us yesterday, we're prepared to leave your house—now."

"At once," I put in, so that Harry's plain meaning might be made plainer still. "This morning."

"You have news—positive news—of your uncle's death at sea?"

"Yes, sir, in his own hand." And again Harry told the strange story of what had happened on

the evening before, concluding by placing the sea-borne message itself upon the table.

"Strange—strange indeed," murmured Dr. Consett. "How strange that this news should have been, as it were, washed into *your* hands, saving time—saving at least four clear days' unnecessary delay! There is the finger of Providence in it. I can see the finger of Providence in the whole thing," he continued in a louder voice; "you know I have always taught you to believe in the finger of Providence. You can see for yourselves, now, its working in what worldly men would call the accidental circumstance that the bottle containing this—this afflicting intelligence was almost thrown up at your feet, instead of drifting along the coast. It is probable that the finger of Providence, in directing that unconscious bottle so that it bobbed about the bows of Dan Runciman's boat—I think you said it bobbed about the bows of Dan Runciman's boat—saved me at least four clear days' expenses with you if you are really going this morning."

Of our own volition we cut the interview short. I believe that he asked us a few questions, but I don't remember what they were. I know that he told us to see him again before we went, and I know that we instantly made up our minds not to.

We didn't go into morning school. Long before it was over, we had finished packing up. We carried our two boxes ourselves downstairs, and

as far as the gates, but there we found Dan and Joe "standing by," and nothing would satisfy them but acting as our porters to the station.

Beechy Bay is connected by a loop line with Exeter. The train in from Exeter about mid-day left again for Exeter soon after midday, and, Exeter being our first stage for London, we had fixed on this train for the start of our journey. The boys would just have time to get down to the station after morning school to see us off.

Not without a few lingering glances at the place where we'd spent six years together—a big slice out of sixteen years of life—we turned our backs on it, and set out resolutely to follow Dan and Joe.

Ten minutes later the train steamed in—in five minutes she was due out again.

We stood on the platform—third-class single tickets clasped safely in our one purse—all ready to get in when the little platform should be clear of the incoming passengers. Joe and Dan were already sorrowfully stowing our boxes in the guard's break. Where were the boys?

They came with a rush and a roar. Not only our own special cronies, not only the boys of the big dormitory, but the whole school—I scarcely think that one was absent. If anything had been wanting to prove the popularity of Harry Saxon, such a demonstration as that stationful of boys kicked up would have done it.

Hoots for The Patient One clashed with shouts for Harry, and even for me. Our hands got swamped in the sea of outstretched palms around us. The most extraordinary donations were forced upon us—pen-knives, a box of sardines, a collection of foreign stamps, two saveloys, a Book of Common Prayer, and some cold potatoes were amongst the miscellaneous articles shoved into our pockets.

The good-tempered stationmaster regarded the scene with a pleasant smile. Near him—looking, I thought, interested, but without any smile on his grave, graybearded face—stood a gentleman whom I had seen alight from a first-class compartment when the train came in.

Just as the bell began to ring, and we were on the very point of taking our seats, Curly Locks restored momentary order. Cap in hand, he shouted—

“Now then, for the last time, and all together, taking the time from me, ‘Three cheers for Harry Saxon and Ralph Towers. Hip, hip, hip, hur-ray! Hurray! Hurray!’”

Whatever British schoolboys *cannot* do, they can shout; and in the three lusty cheers that broke out at Curly’s demand the boys of Beechy Bay Academy maintained the national reputation.

As the last “Hur-ray!” died away, the grave-faced, calm-looking, gray-bearded stranger who had been standing near the stationmaster stepped

straight up to the now open door of the carriage. With one hand he touched Harry, and me with the other. We turned in surprise.

"Harry Saxon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ralph Towers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where are you going?"

"Why do you ask, sir?" demanded Harry.

"To London," answered I.

"Not by this train, at all events," said the mysterious stranger, calmly and firmly. "If your boxes are in—or anything of that sort—have them taken out at once."

Joe Runciman was standing near, and caught these words, though they were uttered by no means loudly.

"Not to go, sir? Boxes out, sir? Yes, sir," and he'd rushed to the brake and hauled out those boxes in a twinkling.

"Stand a little back with me, please. Stationmaster, these young gentlemen will not go by the train. You can start it."

The speaker added something that was audible to the stationmaster only. The latter touched his cap, gave the signal, and away puffed the engine.

"Come into the booking-office, and get your money back in exchange for your tickets."

"Who—who are you, sir?" asked Harry bluntly.

Even he had been so taken aback that he'd only just found his tongue again.

"I'll tell you directly. Come and get your money back. And please ask all those friends of yours to go away. My men"—this to Dan and Joe—"take those boxes where they came from. Now, young gentlemen."

All things considered, and taking into special account the stranger's calmly masterful manner, I suppose it is not to be wondered at that we did what he told us to.

But in the booking-office we both repeated the question—

"Who are you, sir?"

"I am Mr. John Dexton," he answered, "of Lincoln's Inn! Were you going to London to see me?"

"We were certainly going to call on you—first, sir," replied Harry, hesitatingly.

"So I judged. Take me to Dr. Consett's."

We walked on either side of him, our brains in a bit of a whirl. I am sure that Harry's brain was in a bit of a whirl as well as mine, because our feelings were always the same.

"What has Mr. Dexton come down here for?" was the uppermost thought in our minds.

The walk to the school was not a long one, but before it was over we had told him all we had to tell, and, in return, he had told us—nothing.

We took him direct to the sanctum itself, and Harry rapped his knuckles on the door.

"Come in."

"Come in with me," said Mr. Dexton.

As, in about half a dozen words—he spoke as though he was in the habit of charging himself three-and-sixpence a word, and was a frugal man—he introduced himself to Dr. Job Consett, the face of the Patient One was a study. He motioned his visitor to a seat, and turned to us.

"Leave the room."

"No; let them stop."

"Wouldn't it be better, as, I presume, you have come to talk about these lads—wouldn't it be better that they should not be present at our interview?"

"No. What I have to say is more to them than to you, Dr. Consett, and there is no occasion for me to say it twice. Let them remain."

Wasn't it jolly to hear the harsh, overbearing master of Beechy Bay Academy spoken to in this cool manner! He bowed, but scowled as he replied, "As you will, sir."

The dead silence that followed was broken by the calm voice of the lawyer—calmer than ever.

"Apart from the evidence in the possession of these young gentlemen, such other information has come to hand respecting the *Eastern Star* as to put her loss at sea beyond doubt. For reasons into which I need not enter, the underwriters

long had hopes that she would still be heard of. Those hopes have now been proved to have been without foundation, and the ship was yesterday posted at Lloyd's as having foundered with all on board. Not a word has been received of a solitary survivor. In these circumstances, the death of Major Gabriel Bengough becomes a legal assumption."

"And these two boys," interrupted Consett with a snarl, "are left on my hands friendless as well as penniless."

"Be good enough *not* to interrupt me," was the freezing rebuke he received. "The death of Major Bengough becomes a legal assumption," repeated Mr. Dexton, "and probate of his will will be granted."

"His will?" snapped in the Doctor eagerly.

"His will, of which I only received particulars from Bombay yesterday afternoon. I had been led to understand that the deceased was a poor man. He proves to have been a wealthy one. The fortune he had acquired represents a yearly income of not less than seven thousand pounds a year."

Our amiable schoolmaster simply gasped.

"Seven thousand a year!"

"Not less than seven thousand pounds a year. The whole of this income passes to——"

"To whom?"

"To whichever is the elder of his two nephews, Ralph Towers and Harry Saxon."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED.

DR. CONSETT sprang to his feet and leaped at me. He seized my hand and wrung it in a regular spasm of affection, so to speak.

"My *dear* lad," he gurgled, "God bless you! Seven thousand a year! My *dear* lad! Let's see: you *are* the elder? You're a trifle—a trifle, but that's enough—a trifle older than your—your dear cousin, Harry Saxon, here."

"No, I'm not," I cried; "his birthday's a fortnight ahead of mine."

"Oh, of course! I forgot."

If my hand had been a hot potato he couldn't have dropped it more quickly than he did. He got at Harry with a bound.

"God bless you, Harry, my dear lad! Always my favorite boy; my particular and special seven thousand—I mean my special and particular pride. Talk about the finger of Providence! This—this is the hand! Stand out of your cousin's light, Towers; why do you push yourself forward so?"

With a look of disgust upon his honest face, Harry shook himself free from the hands that were fawning upon him.

“Mr. Dexton,” he said, “this has come upon us so suddenly and so very unexpectedly that you can’t expect us—Rafe and myself, I mean—to grasp it at once. As Rafe has said, I *am* the elder by about a fortnight. Do you mean that that accident makes me our uncle’s sole heir?”

“Yes. It is desirable to remark that the late Major Bengough was a man of peculiar disposition, and perhaps even more peculiar habits. That much of him I know: but little else. I acted for him in nothing but his payments to you, Dr. Consett. With the whole of the capital sum he had amassed, he purchased, as recently as last year, the fine estate of Westwood, near Malpas, Cheshire, which, it appears, belonged to the Bengoughs generations ago. The purchase was completed on his behalf by a member of a Bombay firm of solicitors who have now placed themselves in communication with me, that member coming to England for the purpose of the purchase, and returning as soon as it was effected.”

Here Mr. Dexton laid upon the table a formidable bundle of papers, as though for reference. Keeping his hand upon them, he continued in the same calm tones—

“Before sailing (doubtless to take possession of Westwood) Major Bengough executed a will.

It is not for me to characterize the provisions of that will, but to state them. In brief, their effect, as I have said, is that his entire fortune—to wit, the demesne of Westwood, with its rent-roll of seven thousand a year—passes to the elder of you two nephews—yourself, Master Saxon, it appears.”

“ May I—may my Cousin Rafe and I ask you a few questions, sir ? ”

“ Certainly, my lad,” said Mr. Dexon, more genially than he had spoken yet.

In his own plain, straightforward way Harry asked a number of plain straightforward questions, which the lawyer answered plainly and without hesitation. He said something about executors and trustees, and touched upon other points. But the one great main fact that filled my mind, to the exclusion of details, was that Harry was all right for life. Careless of the presence of lawyer and preceptor, I grasped his hand—the hand for the clasp of which I was, before the next day’s sunset, to long as we only long for

“ The touch of a vanished hand.”

“ Why, Harry, old chap,” I cried, “ bravo ! you’ll be a rich man all your days.”

And Harry Saxon’s clear, crisp voice—to hear which I was, before the next day’s sunset, to long as we only long for

“The sound of a voice that is *still* ”

—replied in ringing tones—

“Then so will you be, Rafe—we’re CHUMS!”

The news spread like wildfire. Excited knots and groups of boys discussed it in all its possible (and impossible) aspects. Harry and I were besieged on all hands with eager requests for a repetition of the story. It was well for us that, startling as it was, it was still in its main features a simple story, and one easily told.

“Seven thousand a year!” exclaimed Curly Locks; “why, my godfather isn’t in it.”

It was past twelve o’clock that night before any boy in the big dormitory made the slightest attempt to go to sleep.

“How can anybody go to sleep,” said one of the fellows, laughingly, “with a chap in the room worth seven thousand a year?”

“And who was sold up last night by public auction,” chuckled Harry. “Oh, I say, we’ve settled it together, Rafe and I, that everybody is to keep what he bought, but nobody is to pay for anything. So you have got to take that fiver back to-morrow, Curly. We don’t come into fortunes every day.”

“The way you put that,” remarked Walter Locks seriously, “shows that you feel that however generous your uncle has been to you, Harry,

he's been awfully unjust to your cousin, who was just as much his nephew as you."

"I do feel it," returned Harry impulsively, "and though Mr. Dexton says I'm bound down by a lot of provisions as to keeping the estate in order, and as to some other things, I know jolly well that I'll find a way by which Rafe will have his whack out of uncle's money as well as myself. It's fair enough for a horse to win the Derby by a neck, but not for an innocent chap to lose a fortune by a fortnight."

A smothered cheer from both sides of the room greeted the enunciation of this sentiment.

"I expect that your mother, and not Rafe's, was the major's favorite sister."

"No; there's nothing in that idea at all, for he actually didn't know which of us, under the terms of his will, would inherit. 'The elder of my two nephews, the sons of my sisters So-and-so and So-and-so'—that was the phraseology of the will. Mr. Dexton read it so, or distinctly to that effect. He said that uncle was a bit of a crank, and it's my idea that this leaving of all to one was just a freak, of which we shall never get any explanation."

"Has Dexton gone?"

"No; he's stopping over to-morrow. You see, arrangements have to be made about what's to be done with me till I come of age. Old Consett's mad to keep me here now; but after the way he

treated Rafe and me before this sudden change of fortune, I'll take care—and he knows it—that neither of us stops with him.”

“I should think not,” came from several quarters. At last snores from one bed and another told their own tales.

“Good-night,” muttered some drowsy voices, and others joined the sleepers.

“I say,” burst out Locks, in a last startling question, “supposing you were to die, Harry, who'd take your place, and be owner of all this property?”

“Don't you talk about Harry Saxon dying,” I cried indignantly.

“I don't want to, Rafe,” answered Curly, rather inconsistently; “but all the same, supposing he did, who'd inherit?”

“If you must know, *I* should,” I said. “It happens that that very point was raised and made clear. I should be what Mr. Dexton called Harry's next-of-kin. If he were to die to-morrow, I should come in for the lot.”

I answered lightly, little dreaming that in a few hours' time, by those who heard them, so cruel a light would be thrown upon my words.

The next day was Saturday, and a whole holiday. Even now I don't like to think of what happened—I never shall like to think of what

happened. I will try to write quickly of—of what happened.

I had set my mind on spending the day with Harry on Bay Island—we certainly had enough to talk about.

In the presence of about a dozen of our school-mates I suggested the trip to him.

For some reason or another he didn't want to come. I urged him to do so—strongly.

Too good-natured ever to give first place to his own desires, he yielded, and we started off. Some of the others offered to join us; but I put them off—I wanted Harry all to myself.

Arrived on the shore, we found the little *Curlew* beached. We ran her to the water's edge, jumped in, and shoved off. Harry took one oar and I the other, and a few minutes' rowing brought us to the island.

We made the boat fast and landed.

An hour passed pleasantly enough in our usual pursuits on the spot.

Then an idea suggested itself to me.

"Harry," I said, "let's go for a sail—the wind's serving nicely. We can run round the headland and back in no time."

"I'd rather not come, old man," Harry replied, "unless, of course, you'd particularly prefer my company to my room. I'm on the track of some rare specimens for my museum—old Curly will have to let me have it back now—and unless I get

'em before the tide's higher I shan't be able to get 'em at all. But it's a soldier's wind, and you can manage the boat easily enough single-handed. Go by yourself, Rafe."

I took him at his word—there was no reason why I should not.

I cast loose the *Curlew's* painter, hoisted her sail, and stood out to sea.

A few laughing words of farewell were exchanged between Harry on the island and me on the boat as she got under way.

Oh, what a long farewell it was to be!

Out I sailed beyond the headland's farthest point. Then, coming about, I headed the *Curlew* shoreward, but towards the leeward of the promontory, coasting which on its westward side I shut myself out of sight of the island. The weather changed suddenly. The wind veered several points, and blew in gusts that rapidly grew stormier. The waves began to rise higher, and to hiss angrily as the bows of my little craft cut through them. Out at sea I saw the white horses riding the billows.

I would run for the island now at once and take Harry on board, so that we might make for the shore—though we both liked a bit of a breeze.

I had to take in three reefs before I fetched the extremity of the headland, which I had a little difficulty in weathering. Having done so, I ran for Bay Island.

I hailed loudly as I approached it.
No answering hail greeted my ears.
Landing, I gazed around me.

Where was my chum? He was nowhere to be seen.

I hailed again—again—and yet again.
But no voice replied.

It took me less than half an hour to explore every nook, every corner, every cranny.

Harry Saxon was nowhere on the island!

How unlike him it was to have done what, of course, he must have done. How unlike him it was to go ashore by means of some passing rowing-boat or smack, instead of waiting for me.

But, of course, it would be all right. Of course it was all right. If he wasn't on the beach he'd be in the village—very likely at Dan Runciman's. If he wasn't in the village he'd be at the school; if by any chance he wasn't at the school, at all events he'd be somewhere about.

Only I'd go after him at once.

Why, there was somebody making signals to me from the beach. It must be—yes, it was—old Dan Runciman. Alternately he raised and lowered both of his open hands.

I knew what he meant. The wind was blowing off the shore now, and blowing so hard—having increased in violence during every moment I was searching the island—that I wasn't to set sail.

But the tide had turned, and was running out now so strongly that could I get over it with either oars or sculls in the teeth of the gale?

Though it was doubtful, I must chance it, because, although, of course, Harry *was* ashore, still, to see him there would make assurance doubly sure.

But—and the significance of the fact for the first time burst upon me, so to speak, like a flash—if he had gone ashore, how was it that he had left behind him his net, his metal box, his rod and line, all lying close to my feet?

With feverish haste I hurried to embark. Before I could get off, I noticed Dan pulling towards me in a skiff.

No, he had seen or heard nothing of him; his first question proved that—

“Where’s Master Harry! Isn’t he with you?”

We made the skiff fast astern, and pulled for the beach. Not there, not in the village, not in the school, not anywhere about.

Harry Saxon hadn’t come ashore!

All the afternoon, all the evening, the search was continued.

Men and boys went along the coast in both directions; others walked and drove inland.

Later on, as the boats came in, eager questioners awaited them.

No news from left or right, from land or sea.

A cloud was on every brow ; a sorrow in every heart ; a horror in every mind.

“ Harry Saxon is drowned ! ”

Without any thought of wounding me—without a thought, I am certain, of saying anything out of harmony with what we all felt—somebody exclaimed—

“ He inherited a fortune yesterday—to die to-day. And you, Rafe, come in for it all.”

“ Oh, don’t, don’t,” I sobbed. “ I’ve forgotten that—I’ve forgotten that ! ”

“ But you didn’t forget it last night, Ralph Towers,” cried Walter Locks, passionately. “ You took him out this morning—alone. He didn’t want to go, but you made him. A lot of us heard you,” he went on furiously, “ and you wouldn’t let any of us go with you. You took him out alone ; you came back alive and well, safe and sound. Where’s Harry ? ”

A score of voices joined his in challenging me—

“ What have you done with Harry Saxon ? ”

CHAPTER VI.

WAS HARRY SAXON MURDERED?

IS it to be wondered at that through all the weary hours of that night I never closed my eyes? Before the breaking of the Sabbath dawn I rose and groped my way downstairs, and out of the house. The peep-o'-day was just showing, and soon all the eastern sky grew gray, and the gray grew white, and the white red.

I knocked at the door of Dan Runciman's cottage, and Dan himself opened it, ready dressed. He, too, had been early up and out.

"Dan, any news?"

"Yes, sir."

"Quick, Dan, quick! What is it? Good or bad? Tell me quickly!"

"My news is nothing to *tell*, Master Ralph; it's something to *see*. Look!"—and he turned the handle of the door of his tiny sitting-room and pointed. There on the table lay the coat and cap which Harry had worn the previous day, and near them was one of his boots.

“Washed up by the tide, sir.”

The sight of them seemed to stab me. I think I grew whiter. I know that my heart beat so fast and painfully that I almost fainted, for the first time in my life. I heard Dan's voice, but I heard it as we seem to hear the unreal voices that speak in dreams.

“Poor Master Harry must have took it into his head to go for a swim, and stripped at a place where the sea would reach at flood. Cramp must have seized him, and the tide carried his body out to sea.”

Joe came downstairs, and shook hands with me silently. He was going to say something, but a look at my face checked him.

Dan took me into the room behind, and spread a clean white cloth upon the table, and noiselessly set it for breakfast. I swallowed a cup of hot tea, and then said good-bye. Perhaps after I had walked far along the cliff-top my brain would not feel so numb.

“You'll come up to the house at once, Dan, won't you, or you, Joe, if—if you hear anything, or if any more news comes ashore?”

“Aye, sir; we will, at once.”

As I reached the school-house two hours later, the first gong was sounding for breakfast, and the boys were falling in to be marched to the “long room.” But I was told that the Doctor had inquired for me; I was to go to him at once.

Already the news was known, to the household and to him, of what the tide had washed up.

For the last time in my life I entered his sanctum. I don't know how it was, but I did not at first look at him but beyond him—out through the open windows. The soft air of the summer morning was full of the sunshine that, away in the distance, turned the blue of the sea into the yellow of gold. I remember how the trees were bowing their green heads as though in salutation of the majesty of the new-born day. I remember that their branches rustled, that birds sang. I can remember the humming of bees, the scent of flowers.

I turned my gaze upon the fair scene without to look upon Job Consett within.

His crafty face was pale, his shifty eyes were (for once) fixed upon me piercingly.

Was it as he looked at me—mistaking the pallor of my cheeks, and the dulness of my eyes, and, perhaps, the trembling of my hands, as tokens of the working of a guilty conscience—was it as he looked upon me that he resolved upon the bold, rash move he made?

After all, what would he risk by doing what it was in his mind to do? What would he lose if his shot in the dark missed its target?

On the other hand, I was only a lad of sixteen. If his shot *should* hit home, how easy, at such an age, so to entangle me as that I should be power-

less to shake off the clutch of his fingers upon me when I should command the rent-roll of Westwood!

He drew the bow, and the arrow singed its uncertain flight.

His hands trembled as he put them on my shoulders; his voice, sunk to a hoarse, rasping whisper, shook.

"Ralph, how did you do it? Was it a push from the boat, far enough away from land? Tell me how you did it. Give me your secret and I will give you—my silence. How did you murder Harry Saxon?"

With both hands I seized him by the throat, and dragged him to the door, to open which I only released one hand.

With a strength which nothing but the temporary madness of my passion could have put into my arms, I dragged him along all the intervening passages to the long room. Crashing the door open with my foot, I dragged him inside—still by the throat.

Still by the throat, I dragged him to the raised upper table, where were the under masters and Mr. Dexton.

In sight of them all—men and boys—as they sprang to their feet, I flung Job Consett to the floor; then I faced them—all.

"There are boys here," I panted, "my own school-fellows, who suspect me of having had a

hand in the death of my cousin Harry Saxon. This man"—and I pointed a scornful but quivering finger to the prostrate form at my feet—has *accused* me of his murder!

"I'm going away. If ever I enter this place again, it will be because Harry isn't dead, and I've found him, or because I've fathomed the mystery surrounding his death.

"As for the miserable money, if Harry's alive it's his. If he's dead it's mine. But I won't benefit by one penny of it—I won't touch one coin of it until I can touch it with hands that nobody shall dare to suspect of having blood on them; no, not if I die a pauper in the workhouse, or from starvation on the roadside or in the gutter!

"I'll try to prove myself not quite unworthy of having been Harry Saxon's chosen chum. In a sense, I'm placed between a Friend on one side and a Fortune on the other. I'll stick to my Friend!"

CHAPTER VII.

FACING THE WORLD WITH A "FIVER."

NOT a hand was raised to stop me as I rushed from the room. Bolting straight upstairs, I shouldered my box, marched to the front door, and let myself out.

My eyes were blinded by passionate tears as, without a single look behind this time, I strode away down the dusty road. I hastened my pace at every step, till the school-house and its surroundings were, I knew, out of sight.

Then I halted. Placing my box close to the green hedgerow, I threw myself down beside it. Where was I going, and what was I going to do? The clearest idea I had was that of getting to London, somehow, as soon as possible—which is not saying much for the lucidity of my other ideas. If I could only reach the great city, I had vague thoughts of finding there "something to do." But even if I tramped it I couldn't get there without money. Had I any?

It wasn't necessary for me to search my pockets—I knew that they were empty of gold, silver, or

even copper. The note that Curly Locks had given us, had pressed upon Harry and me after the sale in the big dormitory, we had given back to him. And if we hadn't, I couldn't have touched a farthing of Locks's money after he had said—what he had said.

My meditations were interrupted by the sight of two blurred figures coming towards me from far down the road. When they had approached a little nearer, and after I had drawn my hand across my eyes, the blurred figures resolved themselves into the burly forms of Dan and Joe Run-ciman. My conscience smote me for my thought of leaving Beechy Bay without bidding them good-bye.

I jumped to my feet, and walked quickly forward to meet them.

I knew before we had exchanged a word where they were going, and for what purpose, for Dan was carrying the things the tide had washed up—the articles he had shown me a few hours before. They were taking them to the school-house.

The old fisherman's red face grew very grave as he listened to my story, and Joe shuffled his feet and twisted his big fingers uneasily.

"Well, sir," said Dan slowly at last, "it's not for me to say either 'bide' or 'go,' but I do say bide for to-day—bide for to-day and to-night in my cottage. Don't you understand why, Master Rafe?"

“The tide, you know,” put in Joe rather huskily, “the next tide might——”

“Might wash something else of poor Harry’s ashore?” I said.

“Might wash *him* ashore, sir.”

“Friends will be all along the coast, Master Rafe, looking for it.”

I shivered at that last word. I understood well enough now what Dan meant, and fell in with his suggestion without any further hesitation.

Dan went on by himself; Joe, lifting my box with an ease that I envied, turned back, and walked with me to the little white cottage on the beach, where his father presently joined us.

“I see the lawyer gennelman from London,” he remarked. “Says he to me, sharp like—

“‘You know Master Ralph Towers?’

“‘Yes, sir,’ I says, truthful.

“‘Did you meet him as you came here?’ he asks.

“‘Yes, sir,’ I replies, also truthful.

“‘Where?’ he says.

“‘On the road to the station, sir,’ says I, likewise truthful still.

“‘There’s no other train out to-day but the one o’clock to Exeter?’

“‘No, sir,’ and with that I come away. He’ll be at the station for certain, to stop you going by the train.”

"Then he'll be there to-morrow for the same purpose," I said a little nervously.

"To-morrow's Monday. Nokes, the carrier, starts from the Blue Anchor with his little van for Exeter, at eight o'clock."

"So he does, Joe ; thank you for reminding me. I'll go with him as far as Exeter, and then on to London by the train."

But almost with the words came the embarrassing thought, "How am I going to pay Nokes for the ride to Exeter, and the railway company for my journey to London?" and somehow (perhaps a cloud on my face told its own tale) the thought communicated itself to Dan and Joe simultaneously, for I saw them look at each other meaningly at the same moment. Shortly afterwards they made an excuse for going out together. I am certain that they went to concoct the plot that they carried out later on: when the lamp had been lit after supper. In the mean time they had managed to elicit from me a statement as to the condition of my finances.

Old Dan sat at one end of the small table, and young Joe at the other, each smoking black tobacco from white clays ; I choked about midway between them.

Dan opened the ball by tipping Joe such a tremendous wink that it might almost have been heard.

"Joe !"

"What is it, old 'un?"

Joe often called his father "old 'un," but in such a manner as to rob the term of all suggestion of disrespect. As he spoke he returned the paternal wink with filial fidelity of artfulness between them; it is a wonder to me that this pair of whole-hearted, stout-souled, big-bodied innocents didn't make the lamp-flame shake with their winking.

"About them investments of ours, Joe."

"Ah! you're quite right, father; we did ought to see to 'em."

"Undoubted, Joey," said Dan firmly. "I shall sleep easier of a night——"

"When the stormy winds do blow," suggested his son.

"O-o," added Dan with awful solemnity, apparently in order to give the proper rhythmical ring to the quotation. "I shall sleep easier of a night, when the stormy winds do blow-o-o—as you truly remark, Joe—with that there money out o' the house, and invested in—in—in things."

He appeared to realize that this was a trifle vague, and hastened to get upon firmer ground. With the air of an acknowledged expert in matters financial, he ruled—

"To keep on the strick proper tack, a investment is not a investment until it's invested. Never forget that, Joey."

"No, old 'un, I won't," promised Joe, who

looked a little awe-stricken at his father's philosophical mastery of the subject he had brought forward.

"Why, Joe," cried the financial expert in tones intended to convey the impression that an idea had just struck him, "bless my soul if this here going away of Master Rafe to London can't be sort of turned so's to help us out of this inwisting mess as we're in."

"So it can—so it can, old 'un," agreed Joe delightedly. "Go on—tell him all about it."

Dan Runciman took his pipe out of his mouth as he turned to me, and waved it in graceful emphasis of some of his chief points.

"Well, you see, Master Rafe, it's just like this here. The profits as me and Joe have been a-making out o' that there fishing-boat of ours—the profits alone, not to say anything about our losses—no, no, I don't mean that; I just mean the profits—them profits as I've made alloosions to—them profits have been—they've been—what have they been, Joey?"

"Enormious," answered Joe.

"That's it—that's the word. Enormious. Why, they've been that enormous that this is what we've come to. We've got a matter o' five pound to invest, and we're both blowed if we know how for to go about it. Then here you come along just in the nick o' time, all sail spread for London, as is well knowed to be the very

place for investments of all sorts. That's where *you're* going to invest. You're going to invest *yourself* there. You're a-going for to make a fortune there.

"Just let me brush that there earwig off your coat, Master Rafe."

He broke off suddenly to brush his hand across the region of my chest, and then resumed quickly—

"So me and Joe invests our investment in *you*—in fact, you becomes our investment. You go to London, makes a fortune——"

"Twice Lord Mayor o' London town," murmured Joe.

"Very good, Joe—very good indeed. As I was making allusions to, off you go, make a fortune, comes back, punches old Consett in the 'ead or the heye, accordin' as he may choose to take it, and pays back me and Joe."

He had spoken so rapidly—since brushing away that earwig—that I felt quite mystified.

"Pay you back what, Dan?" I asked.

"That there five-pound note as you've got in your outside breast-pocket. Now, don't go for to deny you've got it, because I've got a heye-witness as saw me shove it in—my son Joe here."

I hastily put my hand inside my pocket. Sure enough, as neatly as a conjurer, old Dan had slipped in a five-pound Bank of England note

when he brushed off the earwig. For the second time in my life I held "a fiver" in my own fingers. I can't remember the words I used to explain to them that I saw through their dodge, and couldn't accept their generous help; but I remember that their tobacco-smoke had got into my eyes fearfully, and I remember also how quickly they both "picked me up."

"Now, don't you go running away with that 'generous help' deloosion in your noddle!" roared old Joe, with an honest attempt to look savage. "There's nothing in the 'generous help' line in—in—in—in—there's nothing of the kind kep in *this* shop. What you've got there ain't a gift, but a inwestment, to be returned with—with—— Confound it, Joe! why don't you help me? What's it got to be returned with! Not thanks, but——"

"Interest, old 'un; that's it—interest."

"Interest it is. Thank'ee, lad; you're quite right. Master Rafe, if that there fiver are not returned with interest, you'll be—you'll be—— Here, Joe, what *will* he be?"

It was Joe's turn to triumph now. He brought his fist down heavily on the table as he delivered himself of the portentous sentence—

"He'll be persecuted with the utmost rigger of the Law!"

Dan gave vent to a low, long whistle.

"Think o' that, now? You'll be persecuted

with the most utmostest vigger of me, and Joe, and the Law!"

With the note outstretched in my hand towards Dan, I tried to refuse again.

"Joe, if he *won't* be investest in, just light the fire with the investment to-morrow morning."

At that I put the note back into my pocket, and tried to stammer a few words of what I felt; but——

"Where's Rafe's candle, Joe? He's a-going to turn in. Just show our investment upstairs."

I knew the next morning, without asking any questions, that neither *it* nor any further "news" had been "washed up by the tide."

Dan and Joe both saw me off by the carrier's van. Till it drove out of sight they stood close together looking after it, and waving a series of last parting salutes.

And so, with my right hand still crushed out of shape by the grasp of their right hands, I started off to face the world with a "fiver"—their "fiver"—in my pocket. Long afterwards I knew that the first thing they did after the disappearance of the carriers' van was to launch the *Curlew* in order to work for the wherewithal to buy their next meal.

"Kind hearts are more than coronets."

CHAPTER VIII.

POOLEY DE VERE PULLET.

NOKES the carrier was a taciturn old man. During the whole of our journey he scarcely spoke a word to me. I was glad of it, for I was in no mood for conversation, and his silence gave me a chance of reflection.

I had plenty to think about. Once or twice the thought crossed my mind that I was acting foolishly and inconsiderately. What benefit could arise, either to others or myself, from the course upon which I had so suddenly and so passionately determined? As for clearing up the mystery of Harry's disappearance, and so clearing myself from the dreadful suspicion which had been attached to me, the conviction of my own helplessness obtruded itself more and more plainly.

How was I to make a start? What clue had I to make a beginning with? None. For the faintest hint to guide me in such a task, I was absolutely dependent upon fate—upon chance.

But to such thoughts I would give no place in my mind. It might be that chance might offer

me, sooner or later, the clue I wanted—though it was as true that I must wait for it as that I could do nothing without it. In the mean time I *could* face the world for myself—and I would. I *could* refuse to benefit by the revenue of Westwood, which would in due course all legally be mine by the operation of the same rule of law which had made Major Bengough's death what Mr. Dexton had called a legal assumption, even if poor Harry's body were never found; and I would so refuse. I had a vague idea of making a fortune on my own account. Other boys had run away and made fortunes with less than five pounds. Why shouldn't I?

It isn't worth while to go any deeper into my cogitations, because I shall have my hands fairly full in telling what I did do, and what happened to me and to others in doing it all, without troubling about any very searching analysis of my motives. I dare say that in similar circumstances now, the calmer judgment of a riper age would dictate a very different course from the one I pursued; but—between ourselves—I'd willingly swap some of the "calmer judgment" for those younger years again.

Besides driving very slowly, Nokes stopped at every village and hamlet to pick up parcels, and made several detours in favor of out-of-the-way places. We were consequently so long upon the road that I just missed the train I hoped to catch.

Finding that I had several hours to wile away before the next fast train started for London, I deposited my box in the cloak-room, and sallied from the station to explore the quaint and picturesque old city of Exeter, returning about half an hour before the up express was due.

A number of expectant passengers were waiting near the ticket-office for the opening of the window. One of these attracted my instant and particular attention. If I describe his clothes first and the rest of him afterwards, I shall only be observing the order proper to the occasion, for the former were the most striking things about him. They were in the height of the fashion. His legs were encased in a pair of very light trousers, which fell from the knees and reached to the feet without a single unbecoming crease or wrinkle. At "the parting of the ways" of a precipitate black cutaway jacket an elongated link of yellow watch-chain showed itself to advantage against a background of white waistcoat. A satin cravat glistened at the foot of a regular church-steeple of a collar, which soared towards the level of its wearer's ears, and almost attained it. Not to dwell upon other details, the entire structure was crowned with that abomination of all non-public schoolboys—a silk hat of the chimney order of architecture.

The peg upon which all this finery hung was a lady-like looking young fellow, who might have

been either a little over or a little under the age which has been fixed upon as that of manhood. His hair was so light in color that with the sun upon it it looked almost white. His eyes and complexion were also—I was going to say girlishly—fair. His upper lip was fluffy with yellow down. I don't suppose I should have taken so much notice of this stranger had I not quickly become aware that he was taking notice of me. Although he didn't stare at me—and always averted his glances when he found they were detected—his looks in my direction were, to say the least, such as to betoken a marked interest in either myself or my appearance—or both.

The window went up with a bang. The dandy and myself were amongst the first to present ourselves before it, he being immediately in front of me. After taking his own ticket and moving on, he paused and half-turned his head. I felt positive that he did so in order to hear for what station I demanded a ticket. This increased the ire that I had already begun to nurse against him.

I walked in company with a porter to the cloak-room in order to redeem my box. As the man shouldered it I wheeled about to follow him down the platform. With the first step I took I trod on the toes of the "fair unknown," who colored up guiltily, and hastily withdrew his eyes from the porter's burden. He had not tracked me

along the platform, but, I was convinced, had endeavored to read the label on my property.

I was to endure a still further annoyance at his hands, for, facing sharply round as the porter halted and lowered my box, I detected him close in our wake. This time he marched straight up to me and spoke.

"I beg your pardon," he said, politely enough, but with something of a lisp and drawl that his general appearance justified the expectation of. "I beg your pardon—my name is Pullet—Pooley de Vere Pullet. Are you Walph Towers?"

"Yes," I replied, amazed at being thus identified.

The next moment Mr. Pooley de Vere Pullet was shaking me by the hand, and giving vent to the singular announcement—

"I'm a cweature of impulse. There's more in this than meets the optic!"

CHAPTER IX.

RED LIGHTS AHEAD!

BEFORE I had time to recover from my astonishment, the London express thundered into the station.

“Come along—we’ll twavel together, shall we? Here’s an empty compartment.”

We stepped into the unoccupied carriage he had espied, a porter handed him in a neatly strapped Gladstone bag, the whistle blew, the door slammed, and out we glided.

My companion eased his trousers at the knees to prevent them from bagging, felt his collar to make sure that it was on quite straight, by a dexterous movement of his arms slightly protruded his shirt-cuffs, and laid himself out to talk.

“To make a short story long,” he remarked placidly, “let me tell you all about myself. I’m glad I didn’t lose this twain, or I should have lost this opportunity of making your acquaintance, you know. It’s a wonder I didn’t, for I’m the most awful beggah for losing things you ever met.

I lose evewything. To begin with, I lost my father and my mother before I was old enough to dwess myself."

I thought of my father and my mother, and I suppose my face clouded, for Mr. Pullet asked me quickly, with quite a sympathetic ring in his voice—

"Have you lost yours, too?"

"Yes," I answered.

He held out his hand to me so ingenuously that I grasped it warmly. I began to like him better, notwithstanding the foppishness of his dress and the eccentricities of his mode of speech. Amongst the latter was the pronunciation of his "r's"—some he turned boldly into "w's," and was weak on all of them.

"Losing my pawents," he continued, "I was thrown back on connections and distant welatives, the nearest being my step-aunt, the Honorable Miss Tabitha Pooley.

"It's a wonder I didn't lose them all—it's a wonder they didn't all die—for in other wespects the losing game was kept up; I continued to lose everything. I used to lose my way to school, and had to play the wag—play twuant, you know—in consequence. And as for pwizes, as sure as ever I went in for one I lost it—I lost 'em all. Later on I was sent to Oxford. There I lost my chawacter. I was wusticated—sent away, you know."

"You lost your character?" I said uneasily.
"How was that?"

"It was all because I lost my temper. I lost my temper and stwuck a pwocor.

"Since then I have had a number of situations—for my age, a large number of situations. I've lost 'em, one after the other."

He paused, and I availed myself of the chance to edge in an inquiry. All that he had said tended in no way to explain his acquaintance with my name and personality. How was it that he had recognized me as Ralph Towers?

"I'm coming to that wapidly," he assured me. "Where was I? Oh, yes—my situations. Well, after I had lost the last one, about a year ago, I settled steadily down to doing nothing. Doing nothing would have suited me capitally if I'd had sufficient means to do nothing on. That sounds odd, but you know what I mean?"

I nodded.

"Quite so. Well, having nothing but an absurdly small quarterly allowance from the Honorable Tabbie, what was more business-like than to ask her to make it a larger one? I did ask her, but she said 'no' as firmly as though I'd offered her mawwiage. That compelled me to adopt the dodge I'm still acting on. About once a month I write a sort of circular—a 'Wound-wobin' style of thing—to each of my connections and distant welatives, asking for a wemittance.

Towers, it never comes! That wemittance never comes."

"But what has all this to do with——"

"Hold on. I'm coming to your part directly. There's more in all I've been saying than meets the optic. I'm leading up to your part. You'll soon see where you come in.

"I used to live in the West End of London, but having to cut down all 'x's,' I moved to the North East—to Clapton, where I took wooms."

"Took what?"

"Wooms—chambers—diggings—lodgings. I've got 'em still: I'm going back to 'em now. Now, in the house where my wooms are there also lived, till a fortnight or so ago, a very nice chappie named Algie Goyles. I made fwiends with him, all my older fwiends having got so sick of me. All my fwiends seem to get tired of me. Sometimes I think it must be because I always do my best to bowwow money from them."

In view of the markedly friendly overtures of this singularly candid young man to myself, I thought nervously of the change of my five-pound note.

"I should think that no one of my age has ever been more of a nuisance to his friends than myself.

"Algie was a bank clerk. A fortnight ago he started away on his annual holiday. He went to . . . Towers?"

"What is it?" I asked, struck by the suddenly earnest tone in which he pronounced my name.

"Is my collah stwaight?"

Somewhat pettishly I reassured his mind as to the set of his collar. I pricked up my ears as he continued.

"As I was saying, a fortnight ago Algie Goyles went to Beechy Bay. He put up at the Bay Hotel. On Saturday evening an alarming telegwam came from the hotel landlord to our Clapton landlady, in consequence of which I left impulsively for Beechy Bay by the night mail as far as Exeter, and from Exeter yesterday morning I finished the journey by twap.

"Bad news awaited me, Towers. It appears that poor Algie went down to the beach on Saturday and hired a wowing boat."

"Hired what?"

"A boat—a wowing boat, you know, which the fishermen unfortunately let him go out in alone. Now Algie thought he could wow, but I always knew that he couldn't. And a chappie who thinks he can do a thing when he can't do a thing is worse at doing a thing than a chappie who can't do a thing and *doesn't* think that he can do a thing.

"I've often watched him attempting to wow on the Lea at Clapton. The coxwains of the Club boats used to have fits when they saw him, for he took up all the wiver; and as for the bargees they *told* him he couldn't wow in the most awful lan-

guage. However, he did go out wowing by himself at Beechy Bay on Saturday. Dirty weather came on. And he's gone, poor fellow, boat and all. Neither has been seen again. The boat must have been driven out to sea, and Algie . . . " He didn't say "drowned," but I knew that that was what he meant.

"Of course, there's still some hope, but not much. I've done all I could. I sent a letter to the bank, and another to his people in Yorkshire. Before I left to-day I met a splendid old fellow—your fwiend Wunciman. He told me of your heavier loss."

Again the cuff-encircled hand was extended with the same strangely ingenuous air, and again I shook it warmly.

"He told me a good deal, you know, about you and your cousin. And when he found that I lived in London, he told me that that was the very place you had started for, having left school for good, and suggested that I should look out for you when I got to town. He said he knew London was a big place, but I should no doubt be able to find you by asking people whether they'd seen a well-set-up young gentleman with—and then he drew your likeness so well that . . . that that's how I spotted you at the station behind us. I felt an impulse to act on Wunciman's tip and intwroduce myself. I've been subject to impulses all my life, and always act on 'em.

“And now, as a cweature of impulse, I’ll tell you what my idea is. As you’ll be a stwanger in London—Wunciman told me so—why not come with me to Clapton and share my wooms till you find something to do? If you’ve got any money, you know”—here he spoke more quickly, although with a certain hesitation of manner which I should scarcely have expected after certain of his own remarks about himself—“if you’ve got any money, you know, you can spend some of it in the commissawiat department—in other words, on gwub, you know. If you haven’t got any money, we must wub along on tick, till we can manage to waise the wind together. I shall send out my wound-wobin circular for August in a few days’ time, though nobody will answer it with a wemittance. What do you think of my idea?”

I thought before I answered. In a general way, I had heard a good deal of the snares and traps set for the feet of the innocent and unwary by the rogues of London town, of whom was it possible Mr. Pooley de Vere Pullet was one? Was it possible he had heard of my five pounds, and was keen on capturing what remained of it?

No—a hundred times no. There was something about him that made me feel ashamed of the momentary suspicion.

But he was a stranger to me; I had never seen

or heard of him before. And he gave me the impression of being a spendthrift. If his "allowance" were as small as he made out, he must certainly spend a great deal more of it on his dress than he had any right to—that is, if he paid his tailor.

On the other hand, there was that "something" about him that drew me to him almost against my own judgment. Besides, he evidently knew London, and I didn't; and his knowledge might be of the greatest service to me. He might be able to put me up to the very dodges of which I feared I might, by myself, be made the victim.

I should have to trust somebody—why not Pullet, whose advances, if genuine, were certainly complimentary?

Suddenly the thought occurred to me. Does he know about the fortune? Does he know how I stand with regard to seven thousand a year? Did Dan tell him?

His ready answers to a few "leading questions" convinced me that he knew nothing beyond what he had stated and hinted. The "good deal" that old Runciman had told him about Harry and me included nothing of what I may call our private affairs. But it appeared that, in his guilelessness and warm-heartedness, the "ancient mariner" had so spoken of me as to convey the impression that I was possessed of all the virtues

under the sun, and was altogether the most desirable acquaintance that his hearer could possibly fall in with.

My decision was preceded by only one more reflection. Was there not already a sort of link between us in the fact that he had lost his friend, I my chum, at the same place, on the same day, in the same storm?

"What do you say?" he repeated.

I replied heartily—

"I've got about four pounds, and I'll join you."

An animated conversation followed, in which my new friend proved himself a livelier companion than ever. We exchanged opinions freely, and found that we had several tastes in common.

The train rattled on; the cooler breeze of the evening blew refreshingly in our faces through the open windows of the carriage.

The engine gave the customary shriek of warning, and we closed them simultaneously as we dashed into a tunnel.

After a few minutes of darkness we emerged into the light. Thinking we were through, I let down the window by which I was sitting. As I did so, I looked out and noticed that we were rounding a curve, and that ahead of us was the mouth of the second part of the tunnel, in the blackness of which, on the same line of metals as

we were on, glowed, like monstrous eyes of fire, the red rear-lights of another train.

“There’s a train ahead of us!” I cried, “and we’re smashing into it!”

CHAPTER X.

WHAT WAS THE DEAD MAN'S NEWS?

THREE piercing shrieks in quick succession from the engine of the express—a vibration, as the brakes were applied, that shook us from our seats—a shout of wild alarm, and then—the smash!

I was dashed against the woodwork of the opposite side of the carriage with such violence as to stun me. When I recovered consciousness, the carriage was still upright, but motionless. A babel of cries and groans and screams filled my ears. I groped about with my hands in the darkness, and they touched the body of my companion, stretched at full length along the bottom of the compartment. He, too, had been stunned, and was still partially unconscious, for he murmured feebly as I lifted his head—

“What’s up? Is my collah on stwaight?”

I stumbled to the door and flung it open; then turned round again and dragged him to his feet. He regained his wits now quickly, and followed me as I leaped from the carriage.

The train we had overtaken and run into was a

goods train. Though the operation of the brakes had reduced the violence of the concussion, its effects had been bad enough. The wreck of the guard's van and several of the loaded trucks, and the overturned engine and front part of the express lay across the down line; and a portion of the hideous heap was on fire.

The tunnel swarmed with alighted passengers. Some ran hither and thither as though distracted; others were helping the women and the wounded from the carriages. A few were bearing silent and motionless burdens towards the light. A wild cry, a cry of horror, was raised by one voice, to be taken up by a score of voices: "The down express! The down express is due!" Waving a lantern in each hand, and accompanied by a number of shouting men, a guard—with difficulty they got past the scene of the accident—rushed forward to stop the train that might even then be entering the tunnel. Too late! Already it had entered—already its panting breath was heard.

A mass of terror-stricken men and women surged towards the nearer mouth of the tunnel, and Pullet and I were borne on with the wave. We had scarcely reached the open air before a terrible and never-to-be-forgotten sound told that the second accident had happened.

Help arrived, and some of us helped the helpers.

From beneath one of the carriages of the down train Pooley and I—Pooley behaved like a hero all through—extricated a poor fellow who had not, even we could see, long to live.

We dragged out some cushions, and made an easy bed of them for him to lie upon. He looked at us very gratefully, and tried to speak.

Though his face twitched and was pale, and though his body trembled convulsively, his muscular limbs and the set of his square broad shoulders showed how very strong he must have been—till such a little time ago.

Not far off I noticed a doctor kneeling beside another wounded man. As he rose to his feet—lint in one hand and a cruel-looking surgical instrument in the other—I ran to him.

“Can you come this way, sir?” I asked. “You are wanted badly;” and I pointed to where Pooley was still bending over the cushions.

“Aye, my lad,” replied the doctor. “Why, what’s this?” he added, touching my hatless head; “you’re hurt yourself.”

“Am I, sir?” I said in surprise. Raising my hand, I found my hair thick with clotted blood. But my hurt couldn’t be anything serious, or I should have known of it before, so I hurried the doctor on with me.

When we reached the spot to which I led him, I noticed that Pooley was also hurt. He had a nasty mark over the temple. I must have seen

it before, but somehow, in the excitement, it had made no impression on my mind.

"Will you examine this poor fellow, doctor?"

The doctor held his lantern to the man's face, touched his body lightly, and shook his head.

"No," he said pitifully; "I must attend to those who are not beyond my help. You young gentlemen will be worse to-morrow morning," he remarked as he passed on, "and you'd better let me see you. I am Dr. Burton—anybody about here will tell you where to send for me."

"Towers," said Pullet, in a rather husky voice, "I think he's going. Can you get a light?"

Again I hurried away, returning in a few minutes with a lantern. I held it close over the poor fellow's head. As I knelt beside him to move it into an easier position, the light fell upon my own head also. Pooley broke into an exclamation and an anxious inquiry as he saw the state it was in.

He used both my names in doing so; he called me "Ralph" once as well as "Towers."

The injured man fixed his glazing eyes upon me. I saw his gray lips moving. He was trying to speak.

"Towers!" he gasped, with a palpably painful effort, but quite intelligibly. "Ralph Towers? And"—turning his failing gaze to the other white face bending over him—"are—you—the other

one? Because—if you are the two—I've—brought you—*news*—of——”

His lips ceased to move. Not another word passed them. For the first time in my life I was looking into the face of a dead man!

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAND OF GOLD.

DR. BURTON was right.

Pooley de Vere Pullet—eccentric name of an eccentric fellow—and myself *were* worse in the morning. With others of the slightly wounded, we had been driven overnight to a neighboring farm-house, where the sturdy master, the buxom mistress, and their rosy-cheeked daughters, had done for us all that kind hearts and willing hands could do. Pooley and I had been put to bed in a large, low, old-fashioned room, the sheets and pillows of which were white as snow and sweet as the breath of the honeysuckles that shadowed the window panes. The twittering of birds woke us with the early sunshine from the night's disturbed and unrestful sleep; and we hailed each other across the room and compared notes.

Our heads ached; our bodies felt stiff all over, as though they had recently been starched and ironed with every care.

Presently Mr. Durnstable, the farmer, came in to us, full of anxiety to know how we were

getting on. He was followed by his wife, and his wife was followed by a red maid-servant in a white dress, who brought a huge tray with a breakfast on it sufficient for eight healthy farm laborers.

We ate and drank, and got up and dressed, and began to feel better.

About eleven o'clock Dr. Burton called, and re-dressed our heads, which had been provisionally patched up the night before. He said that we should be all right again in a few days; and again he was right, for we were.

Pooley's bag and my box had been brought up to the house, and we were very comfortable and well provided for; but it was, of course, out of the question to accept the hospitality of good Mr. and Mrs. Durnstable any longer, now that we had quite recovered. In as delicate and round-about way as I could think of I had approached the subject of remunerating them (as far as might be possible out of my slender stock), but they wouldn't hear of it.

"So, Pooley," I said, "we must express our thanks as well as we can, and continue our broken journey."

"We must stay over at least another day," was Pooley's reply.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I've posted my circular for August to all the names on my list, asking for a wemittance,

and I've given Gable Farm as the place where the answers are to be sent."

"But what's the use of all your letters? You say that you never get replies—or, at least, never get the remittance you ask for."

"That's twue enough," admitted the letter-writer moodily. "But I've got so used to asking for it that I shouldn't feel easy if I didn't get off my monthly letter. I should feel as though I'd neglected a sacwed duty—though nothing ever comes of it. But that's not my fault. I give all my connections the opportunity. If they don't avail themselves of it—and they never do—that's their fault."

"And your misfortune."

"Twue. My circular for August was a most touching thing—a composition I am pwroud of. It was short—shorter than I've ever made it before—but calculated to hawwow the hardest heart. In each copy I enclosed a cutting from a local newspaper giving an account of the accident that led us here. Then I went on to say—

"'I am hoverwing between life and death!'"

"I say, Pullet—come, come: wasn't that drawing the long-bow? What's the matter with you?"

"We are all hoverwing between life and death, Towers," rejoined Pullet piously. "My statement was made as a sort of bwoad pwinciple—as a sort of generwal thing. I *am* hoverwing be-

ween life and death. If people choose to give a sort of special and particular application to the statement, and connect it with the accident on the line, that's their look-out, not mine."

I felt that it was not a point in casuistry that could be very easily upset, but I had no wish to argue it.

"To how many people have you posted this precious appeal?" I asked.

"Nine," he answered—"my full list of connections and distant relatives."

"How many replies do you expect?"

"Two or thwee."

"How many remittances?"

"None, Walph. I may have a bucket or two of sympathy, but a wemittance I have long ceased to hope for. For an hour or two after posting yesterday such an extwa-special application to the whole nine I confess that my hopes plucked up again a bit. But a little calm thought was sufficient to cwush 'em all down once more."

Presently our conversation turned, as all our conversations had done during the last few days, to the subject of the man who died in the tunnel with such strange words upon his lips.

Who was the man, whence did he come, whither was he going?

How was it that my name was familiar to him?

What did he mean by asking Pooley, "Are you the other one?"

From whom, or of whom, was he bringing the "news" he never told?

His body had been taken to an inn close to the nearest station, about a mile from the scene of the smash-up, and a mile and a half from Gable Farm. We knew that nothing had been found upon him to show who or what he was, and that up to yesterday no one had come to identify him.

That afternoon we walked again to the station to repeat our inquiries. They were answered as they had been before—no inquiries had been received respecting the unknown, no one had come to claim him. Nameless and unsought for, he had that day been committed to the grave.

"We must give it up," said Pooley as we walked back. "We shall never find out what he meant. And it's no use to form any opinions about it all. When a chap's got no facts to form an opinion on," he remarked sagely, "it's better for a chappie not to form an opinion."

That evening Mr. Durnstable got upon his favorite topic—Australia. He had a son out there, and was never tired of talking about it and him.

"It's all over with farming in England," he declared; "Australia's the only place. Look at my son. He began by shepherding five years ago, and now he owns thousands of acres, with thousands of sheep. It would take you days to walk round his run. He's coining money."

He fetched a number of his son's carefully preserved letters, and read us long extracts from them descriptive of the writer's wild, free life.

These descriptions seemed to fascinate Pooley. The farmer was delighted with his eager interest, and entered with gusto into the points raised by the questions with which Pooley plied him.

"Australia's the place!" he maintained again and again. "There's gold still to be dug out of the earth and gold to be made on the earth. It's the Land of Gold!"

"I've been dweaming of Austwalia all night," announced my chamber-mate next morning, as soon as he ascertained that I also was awake—"and of sheep, and black fellows, and kangaroos."

When we descended to the breakfast-room, I saw that a letter lay beside my plate; and five letters lay beside Pooley's plate.

He sat down and opened the crested envelope of the first that came to his hand.

"From the Honorable Tabbie," he murmured to me across the table.

As he read its contents he sprang to his feet with a strange, loud exclamation of astonishment.

"What is it?" I cried, affrightedly.

"What is it?" repeated Farmer Durnstable—suspending the passage on the point of his fork of a piece of fat bacon to his mouth.

Pooley's eyes seemed starting from their sockets as he sank back into his seat, and panted in tones of bewildered amazement—

“I've got a Wemittance!”

He ripped open a second letter, and gasped—

“I've got another wemittance!”

His hands shook with excitement as he unfolded a third letter. Something fell from it on to the snowy table-cloth.

A third remittance!

He selected a fourth letter.

“This is from my wemote cousin, Sir Lucas de Vere,” he said. “I wonder if there's more in this also than meets the optic—from outside.”

There was—for yet another cheque met his enraptured vision as he unfolded the letter.

He took up his fifth and last communication. Something fluttered from it down on to the carpet.

He grew pale.

“If that's another cheque, Walph, I shall faint.”

He picked it up. I was hoping to see him faint, but he didn't. It was a tract.

As soon as he and I were alone he summed up the present results of his “August circular” thus—

“Nine letters posted—answers to hand, five—one twact and four wemittances.”

The hospitable Durnstables persuaded us—without much difficulty—to postpone our depart-

ure till the morrow, the morning post of which brought Pooley four more replies. Two contained sympathy, *minus* money; one contained a postal order, and one another cheque.

Pooley didn't faint—his capacity of astonishment had been exhausted already.

"Nine letters and nine answers," he enumerated in a business-like tone; "six wemittances and one twact. Walph, we've got close on a hundred pounds in hand."

I didn't say anything, but his use of one word touched me. He said "we," not "I."

"It was that 'hoverwing between life and death' line, combined with the newspaper cutting, that fetched 'em," he went on. "We've got all this money by hoverwing."

My own letter had been from Joe Runciman, in reply to one I had written to his father.

Nothing more had been seen, nothing had been heard. For neither of us was there "any news."

Our traps were packed, the dog-cart drove round to the door. "Good-byes" were exchanged, and off we drove to the station.

Before we left, Pooley begged for all the Australian newspapers in the house, and they were given to him. He flattened them down and put them between the straps of his Gladstone bag, and read them on the journey to London.

That evening we reached his lodgings in Clapton safe and sound.

Anxious to lose no time in looking about for a situation, I asked Pooley, when we had settled down after a good supper, what immediate steps he would advise. I urged that we had better both of us start looking for something to do the first thing in the morning.

“ ‘ Situations ! ’ ” sniffed Pooley disdainfully. “ What’s the good of ‘ situations ’ in this played-out old country ? They only get lost.

“ No, my boy. *I’ll* tell you what we’ll do. I’ve got an impulse. We’ll be off to the Land of Gold. We’ll emigrate.”

“ Emigrate ! ” I exclaimed.

“ Yes. Walph Towers, we’ll buy some cwooks, and go and tend sheep in Austwalia ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD-BYE, OLD ENGLAND.

IN less than half an hour the impulsive Pooley had infected me with his enthusiasm ; I was as eager that we should try our luck in the country of the kangaroos as he was.

Amongst my first thoughts when he broached his tremendous scheme that we should emigrate to Australia and devote ourselves to the pastoral pursuit of shepherding, had been one of sincere and involuntary pity for any sheep that might be so unfortunate as to come under the sway of our crooks ; but this feeling soon melted away before the force of more selfish considerations. I still felt sorry for the sheep, but recognized that they were inferior creatures, and must not stand in the way of our advancement.

We threw ourselves into the preparations for our intended voyage with the greatest ardor. Soon after breakfast the next morning we went up to the City together to inquire about a ship. When Pooley joined me in the sitting-room ready dressed for the expedition, I scarcely knew him.

He had discarded his beaver for a soft brown slouch hat ; his throat was no longer garroted in four inches of starched linen—he wore instead a loose turned-down collar with a carelessly knotted tie. An older and easily fitting suit of gray tweed had superseded his precipitate cutaway and immaculate white waistcoat and light trousers.

It was obvious that, having determined to be a shepherd, he was already, as far as was practicable, dressing for the part. By and by I noticed that in walk and talk he was affecting a sort of free-and-easy colonialism of deportment and diction.

Poor old Pooley ! He was a strange mixture. We visited about half a dozen shipping offices—Pooley seemed to know exactly where to go. Amongst the vessels of which he obtained particulars was the *Clara Dickins*, a large emigrant sailing-ship lying in the East India Docks. Her rates were temptingly low, and she was advertised to sail in a week for Melbourne and Sydney.

“Of course, we should be longer getting out in her,” said Pooley, “than we should be on a steamer, but, on the other hand, her fares being so much less, we should have more money in hand when we landed.”

This remark prompted another remonstrance from me on the score of the unfairness of our partnership, our respective means being so unequal. I had raised this point on the previous

evening ; but now, as then, the capitalist Pooley waived aside my scruples with the air of a prince, and we posted down to the docks to overhaul the *Clara Dickins*.

She was a fine-looking, well-found ship, with comfortable accommodation for hundreds of passengers.

"Walph," said my "partner," as we left the docks, "I feel an impulse coming on to book our berths."

"On the *Clara Dickins* ?"

"Yes, on the *Clawa*."

"Better keep the impulse in hand till to-morrow," I advised ; "we can talk everything over quietly to-night."

The result of a long after-tea confabulation was a decision to act on Pooley's impulse. We visited the agents again next day, and paid our passage-money to Melbourne.

Then we set about buying our outfits, in selecting the numerous articles comprising which Pooley acted with a judgment and discretion that surprised me. His impulses to run down the prices were successful in almost every case, but when the job was finished and he counted the balance left from his remittances he drew a long face—which shortened, however, as the happy impulse seized him to write another "circular letter" to his sorely tried and long-suffering friends. Feeling implicated, I demurred to this

"impulse"; but he was not to be deterred. He sat down and drafted out a clever letter, headed "Emigration" (underlined), and commencing with the statement that "on the eve of his departure for the Antipodes" he was in need of assistance for the last (though he regretfully admitted not the first last!) time. He made nine fair copies of his draft, and posted them all together to the usual nine of his relatives and connections.

"Some of 'em will be so gwaterful that I'm going to the other end of the world," he assured me, "that they'll stump up a thanksgiving."

Sure enough, he received several more cheques on the day before we sailed, and hastened to turn them into money. He soothed my feelings by the easy promise that we would repay these sums out of the first fortune we made. He apparently expected to make a large number. To his mind the connection between sheep and shekels was a close one.

We went on board over-night. About half an hour before the ship cleared out into the stream next morning, we observed from the deck a commotion amongst the men at work along the wharf off which we lay. The stir was evidently caused by the spectacle of an old lady, richly though primly dressed, and followed by two pompous and disgusted-looking footmen in livery, daintily picking her way through the bales and luggage that encumbered the quayside.

"Goodness gwacious!" gasped Pooley; "it's the Honorable Tabbie! She's come to see me off."

As he clambered down the ship's side to pass over the intervening barges on to the wharf to receive his visitor, a roar of laughter from the delighted dockers followed a sad mishap to one of her fat and supercilious attendants, who, missing his footing near the edge (perhaps through holding his nose too high in the air), dropped with a splash and a howl into the water, from which he was rescued with difficulty, and sent away by his mistress to change his clothes.

After conversing with his aunt for several minutes, Pooley moved a little way from her, and called to me to come ashore. I was presented to the old lady, who talked very kindly to both of us, and gave us a lot of good advice. Pooley behaved very respectfully and nicely to her, and I couldn't help thinking, when I saw how genuinely affected he was by the kindness of her speech and manner, that whatever his faults might have been in the past, they must have been faults of the head rather than of the heart. A good heart is much more quickly moved than a bad one. He even hesitated, in a conscience-stricken sort of way, to accept something that she took from her beautiful sealskin purse and slipped into his hand—though the little roll of banknotes did *not* find its way back again.

Amidst all the bustle and excitement, the dear old lady remained on the wharf till the ship began to move, the grim form of her remaining footman towering behind her. She waved her lace-embroidered silk handkerchief in farewell again and again : and once I saw her put it to her eyes.

Before the autumn moon had risen the *Clara Dickins* had made the Channel : the tug had cast off, and the pilot gone ashore. Our long voyage had fairly commenced.

Are the days of adventure over in these latter years of the nineteenth century ?

Pooley and I little knew how very soon we should be qualified to answer the question, from personal experience, with a particularly emphatic "No !"

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS PASSENGER.

FAVORED by magnificent weather, the good ship *Clara Dickins* scudded down the English Channel.

Beechy Bay was not in sight when we passed it, but my eyes were turned shoreward, nevertheless. Pooley joined me as I looked in the direction where lay my old "home." Feeling the clap of his hand upon my shoulder, *I* acted on an impulse. I had experienced before the impulse to take him fully into my confidence—now I acted upon it. He knew so much already that it didn't take me long to tell him the rest. But he had been so open and candid with me that I felt all the better for making a clean breast of the exact circumstances under which I had left Consett's.

"You bolted from seven thousand a year," said my confidant thoughtfully, "because of a lying accusation against you. It's worse than anything else that you bolted under a cloud. I know a lot about mistakes, Walph, because I've made 'em all my life—and you were guilty of a whopper: not

so much in what you did in giving first place to a friend and second place to a fortune as in the way you did it."

It was quite true—I had "bolted under a cloud," but Pooley's way of putting it placed my conduct in a new light—and one in which I didn't feel at all easy.

We emerged from the Bay of Biscay after a rather bad time of it for everybody on board except the seasoned hands. The sailors said we had had a fine passage through the dreaded Bay. They ought to have known, but they didn't know, or they wouldn't have made such a remark.

With a favoring gale astern we bowled along off the West Coast of Africa till we passed from the North into the South Atlantic.

For a day or two the breeze continued, and then there fell a calm, the tedium of which was broken on the third morning by an exciting incident.

The man on the look-out hailed the deck with a stentorian shout of—

"Boat on the starb'd bow, sir!"

To us non-mariners on deck the object he had made out looked just a speck in the distance, bobbing up and down with the swell of the ocean; but glasses held to keener eyes speedily magnified the speck into an open boat containing a single occupant, seated passively in the stern sheets.

One of the ship's boats was lowered, and pulled on for the drifting little craft, which was brought

alongside. Such a strange old gentleman climbed on board from it. After a few words the captain—who looked very much puzzled—hurried him into his cabin, where they were closeted for a long while before the new passenger was seen again on deck.

In the mean time the sailors who had brought him on board answered the questions of a group of excited inquirers.

They spoke very mysteriously—almost superstitiously—of the old gentleman they had rescued. They couldn't make anything of him, they said—but they touched their foreheads significantly, as though to imply that he had lost his wits.

Presently the word was passed for Pooley and myself—the captain wanted to see us!

In silent surprise we followed the messenger to Captain Arkwright's cabin, whither the first mate and the steward had been summoned before us, for they left as we entered.

He was seated opposite the "strange stranger," at whom we could not refrain from gazing.

He was a fine-looking old fellow, whose age might be a little nearer sixty than seventy—with white hair and shaggy gray eyebrows, matching a thick and fierce moustache, than which his beard was so much whiter as to show that probably his chin had long been shaven while his upper lip had not. There was something very strange about his placid face—something wanting. Its placidity

seemed unnatural. I can think of only one way to explain what I mean. It is a phenomenon often noticed that after death the face loses certain marks and lines that have characterized it in recent life—its appearance reverts to what it must have been in previous years, before those marks and lines were there at all, and thus the face itself is wanting in its more familiar aspect.

And this living face at which we looked, though we had never seen it before, conveyed somehow a subtle sense that something was wanting—that something had gone which should have been in company with the shaggy brows and keen gray eyes, the firm lips, and the strong, square chin.

With a few words of apology to his guest, as I suppose I must call him—about whom lingered a suggestion of importance that commanded respect—Captain Arkwright (who was, by-the-bye, as fine a fellow as ever trod a deck) drew us aside.

“You know how this poor old fellow came aboard?” he asked us.

“Yes, captain,” I answered. “We saw it all.”

“Well, who he is or what he is—where he came from and where he was going, or thought he was going—what on earth he was doing in an open boat on the high seas—is all a mystery that he can’t throw any reasonable light on himself, for he says that he doesn’t even know—but” . . .

here a new idea seemed to strike him . . .
“just *you* try it on. One of you go up to him and ask him suddenly who he is.”

I slipped across to the table.

“I beg your pardon, sir—would you mind telling a fellow-passenger who you are?”

“I am called the padre; but I do not know who I am,” was the extraordinary reply, spoken in a voice the gentleness of which seemed to convey again that sense of incongruity, for more strident tones should have rung from such a chest and throat.

“His reason has gone, you see,” resumed Captain Arkwright, speaking lower than ever. “That’s just what he said to me. If he doesn’t know his own name, it’s no use to ask him where he came from or anything else. I’ve been asking him for half an hour who he is, and he’s only answered, ‘I am called the padre—I don’t know who I am.’ Whether I shall put in to land him somewhere or carry him on I shall have to decide, but in the mean time, of course, he must be looked after. Now, I understand there’s a spare berth in your cabin?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pooley and I, who were, I believe, rated as second-class passengers, occupied a small cabin in the fore part of the vessel, but separated from the steerage, and we tumbled to what was coming.

“Well, do you mind having the poor old gentle-

man with you for a time? Some of the emigrants, you know, are a rough lot, and I should like him to be free from the annoyances they might subject him to. Keep your eyes on him, of course; watch him in a quiet way, though he seems as harmless as a child. You're not afraid?"

"Certainly not," we both assured him, and fell in with his suggestion readily enough.

So the sad-faced, gentle-voiced "padre" fell into our charge, so to speak. He was no sort of trouble to us—on the contrary, he interested us greatly, and we grew to like him exceedingly. In some respects he was more like a child than a lunatic—strikingly so. He took a rational and even a lively interest in all that went on around him, particularly after a day or two. But every attempt to remind him of the past, to draw from him some statement as to his identity, was met with the old answer—

"I am called the padre—I don't know who I am. I cannot remember—I cannot remember."

So painful a look used to cross his face as he reiterated this strange statement that we soon ceased to question him.

The ship's doctor—a very young and inexperienced one—could make nothing of the case. It clearly baffled him. All he could do was to say some long words and try to look wise—not very successfully.

The calm lasted a week.

I shall never forget the day before the wind came. It revealed Mr. Pooley de Vere Pullet in a new and unsuspected character—that of a pugilist.

Almost all the emigrants, so far as they met the padre at all, treated him kindly and respectfully. There was a notable exception in the person of one Tommy Jacobs, as he was called—the bully of the steerage. If he could have had his way, the old gentleman would have been made the sport of everybody. During the idle hours of the calm he never lost an opportunity of trying to raise a laugh at the padre's expense—for it had been impossible to prevent the fact leaking out that "something was wrong" with the latter; the sailors who rescued him had said as much. Jacobs professed to be in mortal fear that he would set the ship on fire, or scuttle her. His favorite dodge, when he saw him approaching, was to fly away as though in the last extremity of fear.

Pooley had affected not to notice these demonstrations, but on the afternoon I am speaking of he adopted very different tactics.

Meeting the three of us—the padre in the middle—walking the fore-deck, Jacobs scuttled away as usual, bellowing "He's coming—look out, look out!"

This time our poor old friend seemed to feel that he was being mocked, for his face flushed

angrily, and he made as though he would follow the fellow. But Pooley restrained him, and got him quietly below.

"You may as well come and see fair play, Walph," he said coolly—and I followed him towards the steerage, wondering what he was up to.

We found Tommy Jacobs in the midst of some half a dozen of the worst characters on board.

"Will you come and apologize to the gentleman whom you were wude to just now?" Pooley asked him politely.

A roar of laughter was at first the only answer he received, but he quietly repeated his question—only to be told to go and stick his head in a bucket.

"If you won't apologize, I shall thwash you!"

I could scarcely believe my ears; but that the challenger meant business was certain, for he immediately added, "Step this way, please."

With another guffaw, in which he was joined by his delighted companions, who scented some rare sport in the coming combat (incredible as such a combat seemed), Jacobs and they followed to the entrance of the forecastle, in which were almost all the crew not on duty. Pooley, pointing a careless finger to Jacobs behind him, addressed them in his suavest manner.

"May we intwude upon you to have a fight?"

The enthusiasm was indescribable ; the proposal to turn the fore-castle into a cock-pit exactly suited the taste of its occupants. They offered an uproarious welcome, and cleared a space in a twinkling.

Pooley, who had stripped to his shirt-sleeves before Jacobs had got his coat off, looked at his doubled left fist confidently.

"This is more than gets into a fellow's optic every day," he remarked pleasantly.

It was soon evident enough that, dandy as he was in many ways, he had learnt to box somewhere. Through the first three rounds he dodged so cleverly that he escaped with very little damage. During the two other rounds, having pretty well pumped his man, he gave up dodging and hit. He hit with beautiful judgment and bewildering rapidity.

At the end of the fifth round Jacobs announced that he didn't want any more. Astonished as we all were at the result of the encounter, I don't think anybody was so astonished as the bully himself.

"Will you come and apologize to the gentleman you were wude to?" again asked the victor, as though nothing had happened since he asked the same question before.

"Yes, sir," said Tommy Jacobs ; but the vindictive scowl upon his face made me shudder.

As we stepped out on to the deck a shouted order

reached our ears from the officer of the watch for hands to lay aloft to make sail.

A cloud was spreading in the distant sky—a far-off ripple on the water told its own story. The wind was coming.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WHITE NIGHT.

AGAIN with bellying sails the *Clara Dickins* pursued her course, a few hours bringing us within sight of Ascension Island. The padre looked intently towards the pile of barren rocks, and exclaimed—

“I think that is where I came from—I think so.”

We tried to follow up this faint clue by putting a number of “leading questions” to him, but nothing came of the attempt.

Nearing St. Helena, we heard the captain discussing with the mate as to whether to put in for the purpose of landing him there. The mate seemed to favor the idea; but the wind was holding good, and Captain Arkwright, ambitious of making a record run, longed to retrieve the lost days of the calm, and decided to keep his vessel on her course.

The news of the fight between Pooley and Tommy Jacobs spread fore and aft, and the former was treated with marked respect. There had

previously been rather a tendency to laugh at him. The forecastle hands who had actually witnessed the combat regarded him with specially favorable eyes, and approached him on the subject of having a fight every night, for the general good and pleasure.

"Things is very dull on board, sir," said their spokesman, "and a dozen nice rounds as might be looked for reg'lar would cheer us all up. We've spoke about it amongst ourselves and amongst the passengers, and there's seventeen fine big chaps as is willing to take you on, sir, for to make a start. They'd expect a small consideration, but mostly in the shape o' baccy, sir."

"Do you take me for a pwize-fighter?" inquired Pooley.

"Well, no, sir, not exactly that, though if you *should* give your thoughts to the perfession you'd soar 'igh, sir—'igh. You *can* put 'em up, and no mistake. A angel might have envied you the way you got that left-'andeder on Tommy Jacobs' heye. And anything finer than how you shifted his nose three points towards his port earhole I ain't seen for years. I shouldn't never have thought it of you, sir, for to look at you. I'm downright proud to know yer, sir."

Pooley expressed his gratification at receiving such encomiums, which he said he feared he had done little to deserve. He was glad to have afforded the gentlemen of the forecastle any

pleasure by his little display of the noble art, but regretted that he must decline the engagements into which he was pressed to enter. He begged that his apologies might be tendered to the seventeen "fine big chaps" who had been good enough to offer to face him.

His satire was all thrown away, for the sailor took him quite seriously.

"I'm very sorry, sir—very sorry indeed. It'll be a great blow to my mates. P'raps"—with a doubtful look at me—"p'raps your friend would oblige? There's a apprentice on board a-doing of his second voyage as would be just about up to his weight. They ought to make a pretty little match of it."

I increased his disappointment by declining the suggested meeting, and he walked off disconsolate.

Having long ago found our sea legs, Pooley and I were only anxious for the termination of the voyage in order that we might get seriously to work. Over and over again we discussed our plans, but however much we varied certain details of them, we always agreed that, once landed, we would lose no time.

For a while we continued to sail over sparkling seas under sunlit skies. The nights were scarcely less beautiful than the days.

Then came a change—a sudden change.

We went on deck one morning to find both sea

and sky invisible, for a dense white fog filled all the space between.

But for the swish of the waters, we seemed to be riding through clouds of fog. There was something weird and ghostly in the feeling.

Night brought little difference—for the night was white with fog. When the lamps were lit and swung up, the raking masts looked like thin black shadows falling athwart the all-pervading whiteness.

I was on deck. So, I believe, was Pooley, but I could not see him.

Suddenly, only slightly muffled by the fog, the piercing scream of a syren whistle rent the air. Its echoes seemed so to circle round and round about the ship that I was perplexed to locate the whereabouts of the steamer that must thus have warned us of her proximity.

I heard some shouted orders, and recognized the voice of Captain Arkwright. The voice seemed a long way off, but it only came from the hidden quarter-deck.

His last words were drowned in the dismal hooting of a fog-horn.

The steamer was moving, for the fog-horn was unmistakably sounded nearer to us than the syren.

Again a quickly given order from the quarter-deck—and the helm of the *Clara Dickins*, was put over, some of her sails shifted, and she swung her huge bows to port.

A collision was only just avoided. It can scarcely be said to have been avoided at all, for—as though it had risen from the sea or dropped from the invisible sky—an indistinct black mass was alongside of us—touching us.

As it scraped and bumped along the length of the *Clara Dickins*, I stood just where the light of a lantern fell full upon me.

Loud cries rose from both ship and steamer, and a rush was made to the colliding side of each.

I was thrown to my feet by a crash of greater violence than we had yet experienced.

Rising, I seized hold of the shrouds to steady myself, still in the rays of the light above my head.

Within arm's length of me, clinging to the shrouds of the steamer, and in the midst of a group of men holding lanterns in their uplifted hands, the glow streaming clearly on his face, stood—Harry Saxon.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD CHUM ON AND A NEW CHUM OFF.

WHERE was I? What had happened? I felt the touch, the grasp, the grip of his strong right hand again; the voice that I had thought forever still was ringing in my ears again! Where was I?

Had I been stunned by my fall when the steamer lurched against our broadside, that I did not know? What had happened?

Surely I must be dazed still—that I did not know. Had I leaped to Harry from the sailing-ship, or had Harry leaped to me from the steamer?

Gradually my mind cleared.

Harry Saxon and I were standing on the deck of the *Clara Dickins*: the two vessels had cleared each other—the steamer had glided on into the white night, and was lost to sight.

Harry had leaped from her moving bulwarks on to the deck of the *Clara Dickins*!

Although I knew that this must be what had taken place, it was in a dream that I bore him off with me below.

Incoherent questions, to which only incoherent answers were returned, poured from the lips of each of us before we sufficiently calmed down either to talk rationally or listen with understanding.

Interrupted by my frequent ejaculations, this was my recovered chum's strange story.

"When you put off from the island by yourself," he said, "I watched you sail beyond the bluff of the promontory. Presently I saw you had put the boat about, and were running for the other side. Till the weather came on so dirty I thought no more about you. Just as I was getting a bit anxious to see the *Curlew* coming round the point, I heard a loud cry of 'Help! Help!'

"I thought at first that it must be your voice that was shouting, but it wasn't. The cry came from a fellow in a cockle-shell of a rowing-boat some five or six hundred yards off the island.

"He had lost one of his sculls, and didn't know how to use the other.

"I holloaed to him what to do, but he only splashed about like a girl. The tide was turning and the wind blowing off shore—and every moment the lubber was getting farther away, crying for help all the time. What was I to do, Rafe?

"You see, old man, there was only one thing I could do to help him, so I had to do it. If

he'd known how to use 'em, he might still have reached the island—though not perhaps the beach—by means of his scull and one of the bottom boards.

“As I did know how to use 'em, I chucked off my coat and waistcoat, tore off my boots, and swam away to him.

“I was pretty well pumped by the time I got near him. He held out the scull to help me: I grabbed hold of it, but between the two of us we let it slip. The next moment it had floated beyond our reach—I was too done up to go after it.

“I managed to get on the cockle-shell, and then—well, I did my best, Rafe, but it was no go. Of course, I tried to make headway by paddling with the bottom boards—but I couldn't. We were two miles off shore in no time.

“I saw you, Rafe—I saw the bother you had to weather the headland single-handed. I shouted to you, but you didn't hear—you didn't see, for you never looked.

“We were out of sight of you fast enough. We floated helplessly right out to sea in no time—or in what seemed no time. The highest object on the land had disappeared before sunset.

“In the middle of the night, after she had almost run us down, we were picked up by a tramp steamer called the *Medway*. She was bound for Cape Town direct, and carried us there.

By the first steamer leaving for England—the *Rushbrook Castle*—I managed to secure berths for both of us, after explaining everything to the captain, and satisfying him that his owners were sure to get paid as soon as I reached England.

“It was the *Rushbrook Castle* that so nearly smashed into this ship—to-night’s only the fourth of her voyage to the Thames.

“What I felt, Rafe, when I saw you just now—almost touching me as the two ships locked and heaved over—I shouldn’t know how to tell you if I tried.

“I forgot everything else—lost sight of everything else—but you, old fellow: and I made the jump that brought me alongside you.”

Our hands had found their way together again before I asked him—

“Who was the other chap, Harry—the fellow who has been the real cause of all that’s happened to both of us? Who was the chap you swam out from the island to rescue?”

“And whom I’ve now left in the lurch—he’ll be in a pretty mess when he arrives in London without me. His name’s Goyle—Algernon Goyle.”

“I thought so,” I exclaimed; “Pooley’s friend Algie!”

And then, in my turn, I told at length, and in coherent form, all my story.

As I spoke of what our schoolfellows had

suspected and Consett accused me, Harry made no attempt to restrain his passionate indignation.

"Wait till we get home," he cried furiously. "Wait till we get home, and go and face the lot of 'em. As for old Consett—well, if I'm ever accused of doing away with *him*, there may be some grounds for this accusation!"

I couldn't help thinking that if the Patient One were in that little cabin, he'd really be lucky if he got out of it alive. Certainly he was going to have a bad time of it when the meeting of which Harry spoke should come off—the meeting which was to bring the three of us face to face once more.

"We haven't *paid* him yet, you know, Rafe—you remember?"

I did remember, and said so.

"About your friend Chicken, now . . ." began Harry.

"Pullet—Pooley de Vere Pullet."

"I beg his pardon. Well, this pugilistic masher friend of yours . . ."

"He isn't a masher now," again I interrupted: I hadn't omitted an account of his celebrated combat with Tommy Jacobs—"he isn't a masher now; he's left that sort of thing off—to a great extent, you know."

"Well, anyway, where is he?"

"I'll go and find him; I wonder he hasn't been down before now. Come with me, Harry."

"I think I'd better not, Rafe—I better lie low till my presence on board has been properly reported to the captain. What sort of a man is he? How will he take my jumping on board in such an unceremonious fashion?" he asked uneasily. "The men who were close to you ran fore and aft with fenders just before I leaped, and I don't believe a soul but yourself knows I'm here. Nobody seemed to notice me in the confusion."

How *would* Captain Arkwright take it all?

Following on the strange advent of the padre, Harry's equally unexpected arrival might well disconcert him, to say the least of it.

I moved to the bunk in which the padre was sleeping. He had slept undisturbedly through all our eager and excited talk—much more eager and excited than my partial repetition of it will have made it appear to have been.

I drew aside the curtain, and showed Harry the sleeper's placid and almost childlike face.

Then what I had left untold about the padre I told him.

There was no mistake about it—we must be prepared for ructions when Harry Saxon's adventurous jump aboard was made known to the skipper of the *Clara Dickins*; even though the former had inherited seven thousand a year, and the latter was an amiable man.

But in the mean time, where was Pooley?

I went on deck in search of him.

I was surprised to find that the night had passed. Seen through the thinner clouds of vapor that yet remained, the rising sun, mounting with majestic leisure the eastern sky, looked like a huge red globe of fire. Already lifting, the impenetrable curtain of fog that had hung between the heavens and the sea rolled all away as quickly as it had fallen. In vain I searched; in vain I made inquiries.

“Harry,” I said desperately, when I rejoined my old chum, “there are two things to report to the captain—that you’re on board and Pooley Pullet isn’t!”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD.

CAPTAIN WALTER ARKWRIGHT looked rather glum.

"This promises," he observed, "to be the most extraordinary trip I have ever made. First one extra passenger for me to pick up drops down from the sky in an open boat, leaving his wits behind him. Now another one rises up from the sea and calmly boards me without even a 'by your leave'—at the same time as a passage-paid young man disappears. I am very sorry"—turning more pointedly to me—"about your friend Pullet; I liked him. How he managed to fall overboard I can't understand."

"He didn't, sir," said Harry, confidently; "my cousin and I are agreed upon a theory which accounts for his disappearance otherwise, and which, we are certain, will turn out to be a correct one."

"What is it?"

"His case is about on all-fours with mine, captain. When the two ships got mixed up with each other I saw an old chum, and jumped for him.

My old chum's new chum saw an old chum of his own, and did the same thing as I did—jumped for him on the spur of the moment."

"He was just the fellow to do it," I put in. "He called himself a creature of impulse, and was always acting on the spur of the moment. Depend upon it, sir, he's on board the *Rushbrook Castle*; and when we get to Melbourne, a telegram from him, or even perhaps a letter, will be waiting for me."

"Well, all I can say is that I hope you're right—and I'm glad to think that most likely you are. And now, young fellow"—this was to Harry Saxon—"what about yourself? I suppose you know that I'm sailing for Melbourne direct?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, "and I shall be very glad to come with you."

"You can't do anything else," remarked the captain dryly.

"No," laughed cousin Harry; "and you can't very well do anything else but take me, sir. However, the ship won't lose anything by me, for I shall be able to pay."

We then took Captain Arkwright almost entirely into our confidence. He listened not only with patience but interest to the long story we told him.

As a result of the interview, it was settled that Harry should take the place of Pooley in the cabin with the padre and myself; and long

before we reached our destination he was prime favorite with captain, officers, crew, and all with whom he came in contact on board.

He and the padre became regular inseparables—the latter would not have wanted for another champion had need arisen.

The hopes that had been entertained of making, for a ship of the class of the *Clara Dickins*, an exceptionally rapid run from the Thames to Melbourne were frustrated; baffling winds and adverse storms conspired against her, and it was not until the morning of the twenty-fifth of December—a sweltering hot Antipodean Christmas Day—that she reached her first port of discharge, Williamstown for Melbourne, her draught preventing her from getting over the bar. Although by far the larger proportion of the emigrants were going on to Sydney, a scene of considerable excitement attended the disembarkment of those whose journey ended at Melbourne.

Although otherwise quite ready to go ashore, Harry and I deferred leaving the ship until we had an opportunity of a final interview with her master, with whom the financial situation as regards Harry's part-passage had to be discussed. In the mean time we watched with lively interest the commotion on board and on the pier.

Just as my attention was concentrated on the lowering of the gangway, a gentle hand was laid

upon my shoulder from behind. Turning, I found myself facing the padre, who pointed excitedly to the pier-head.

"I don't know who I am," he said, with the puzzled look that was always so painful, though it was so seldom absent from his face whenever he spoke of himself; "I don't know who *I* am, but I know *him*. He has come back. Look!"

Following the direction of his pointed finger, my eyes fell upon a well-remembered though unfamiliarly garbed figure.

Attired in the loose and easy get-up of an old colonist of the rollicking type, waving energetically—as though by way of a general welcome from an anciently established settler to all the new-comers on board the *Clara Dickins*—a light-colored hat with enormous flaps, there on the landing-stage, in the midst of the crowd of workers and idlers, stood Pooley de Vere Pullet!

He dodged on to the gangway the instant it was down, and sprang on board, catching sight of me as he did so.

"Welcome to Austwalia!" was his greeting as he clutched my hand. "I've been here for days."

"Come down into the cabin, Pooley," I joyfully cried. "Come on, Harry. If the crew recognize you, Pooley, they'll give you an ovation, or want you to fight Jacobs again, just to celebrate the occasion. Come on."

I hurried the two of them below, leaving the padre on deck.

“Pooley, this is Harry Saxon.”

“Huwwah!”

Without waiting for the explanation that followed the introduction, he seized Harry's willing hand convulsively, and shook it the whole time I was speaking. He exhausted his entire vocabulary of exclamations in the course of my hurried narrative.

“I did the same thing as you did, Saxon,” he exclaimed as I finished; “I mean in the manner of jumps. I must have caught sight of Algie Goyle at the moment you spotted Walph—Algie wasn't far from you. I saw you jump off one ship on to the other like a . . . like a kangaroo; and I was seized with the same sort of impulse, and jumped on to the steamer to Algie. We both swopped horses in the middle of the stream, you know. Before I fairly tumbled to what I'd done, the two ships had cleared each other. I was homeward bound on the *Wushbwook Castle*, and poor Walph was left to finish his voyage alone, as I thought, on this ship.”

With some difficulty I subsequently had to silence his self-reproaches at what he called his desertion of me. But realizing, I was sure, that Harry might regard in a similar light his own escapade in “deserting” Goyle, Pooley kept his feelings on the subject to himself until he and I

were alone. As a matter of fact, Harry had often been troubled with similar reproaches of conscience. With native generosity, he seemed to forget the circumstances that had made him the bank clerk's fellow-passenger as well as his rescuer in the first instance—for the latter, in all probability, would never have been able to keep his "cockle-shell" of a boat afloat by himself.

"What did Goyle think?" asked Harry. "Did he suppose I had fallen overboard and been drowned?"

"He did at first," answered Pooley; "but, when we came to compare notes, he knew that it must have been you I'd seen changing ships. The *Wushbwook Castle* touched at St. Helena, where I left her, being just in time to catch a boat of the same line to the Cape, where I caught another steamer for Melbourne. That was how I got here first, after all, and have been waiting for you. Luckily for me, Walph, I had our bank-notes in my pocket-book: they cawwied me thwough. Algie Goyle went on to London—he's back at his ledger long before now."

We talked on until we guessed that Captain Arkwright would be at liberty to see us, and then we all three went to him.

"How much must I remain in your debt for, sir," asked Harry, "until I have telegraphed to England and made arrangements about money matters?"

"You owe me nothing," was the hearty response. "As he's turned up again, you must settle with your cousin's friend, Pullet, here, whose place we will say you took. What you had he didn't have; but he'd paid for it, you know."

The interview was brief. He shook us all warmly by the hand and wished us "good luck."

We sent our baggage ashore, and were just about to follow it when Harry remembered the padre.

"We mustn't go without bidding him good-bye. Where is he?"

A hasty search revealed the fact that he must have wandered off into Williamstown. Doubtless he had seen others leaving the ship and had gone after them, as a child might have done.

I returned to the captain and told him. He expressed considerable concern.

"However," he said, "I'll see that information is given ashore at once, and there's no doubt he'll be found and taken care of."

Without further loss of time, having arranged for the conveyance of our traps, we set off on foot for Pooley's lodgings in the city.

"I knew that the ship was expected in to-day," he explained as we stepped out, "and gave my orders accordingly. We're going to sit down to a seasonable dinner of woast beef and plum pudding."

He hurried us along—with such tempting fare before us we were nothing loth to hasten our pace, and soon passed from the suburbs into the city itself.

Turning, abreast and rather sharply, the corner of a fine broad street, we almost ran into Jacobs, who, half drunk, reeled in front of us out of the door of a dram shop.

With an oath and a curse he staggered out of our way, but not before I had seen the look he directed at the unconscious Pooley, who was too much engrossed in a voluble conversation with Harry to notice it.

I had seen that look on Jacob's face before: for the second time it made me shudder. I wished that the fellow had gone on to Sydney. I couldn't shake off the idea that his presence in Melbourne boded us no good. It seemed to me that his black scowl fell like a shadow across our path on that sunny Christmas morning at the other end of the world.

"The coward will have his revenge yet," I thought nervously, "if ever he gets a chance."

His chance was soon to come.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADOPTING A FATHER.

POOLEY'S little dinner-party was a brilliant success. In the intervals when our mouths were empty, our three tongues wagged fast. Long before the exodus of plum-pudding, Harry and our host were on the footing of old friends. Harry could get on with anybody; he had that rare gift of sympathy that draws all hearts.

After dinner, we addressed ourselves to the subject of what we should do, in connection with ways and means. I was soon exhausted.

"Of course, Rafe," said Harry, "you and I will get off home. Pooley won't mind a dissolution of partnership in the circumstances: there's no need for you to go shepherding when I've got seven thousand a year behind me. Besides, now that you can show me as a living proof that you were guilty of no foul play, it's absolutely necessary for you to come back with me in order to punch old Consett's head."

"Hear, hear," breathed Pooley sympathetically.

"You can't punch his head fourteen thousand miles away from it."

"Impossible," agreed Pooley.

"Very well, then. Now, as to raising the wind. I don't think there ought to be much difficulty. I shall go to one of the banks here and get them to telegraph to their London agents, who will go and see Mr. Dexton. Dexton will settle with them, and then a telegram will come out opening a credit for us sufficient for our purposes."

"You won't need to do all that," said Pullet. "I'll put you up to a better plan. In the first place—of course, if you don't mind, you know—I shall go home with you. We'll all go together."

"Bravo!" cried Harry and I with one voice. Pooley's determination was particularly pleasing to me, for how could I have gone without him after all his generosity?

"Yes," he went on, "I'm quite set on going back. I've had an impulse that way ever since I found out the true state of affairs in the colony. Things here ar'n't so wosy as we thought, Wafe. Almost as soon as I landed, I met an old school-fellow. He was captain of the school, in a tail-coat, while I was the youngest kid, in jacket and knickerbockers. He's been here for years, and he opened my eyes. He's done well himself, but says there ar'n't the same chances now as when he came out. He's in the shipping line, and

offered to lend me enough to take me home, as soon as I felt like going, which he said wouldn't be long. Now, if we go and explain matters to him, I know he'll stump up the necessary for all of us. I'll bowwow my passage-money of you, Saxon, and pay you back by bowwowing of somebody else when we get to London; and then I'll settle down to a situation again—until I lose it. Excuse me for not calling you 'Hawwy,' Hawwy; but I can't pwonounce 'Hawwy,' you know, because of the two beastly 'r's' in it."

After a few inquiries respecting his friend, we decided to act on Pooley's suggestion and lay our case before him.

"No time like the pwesent," said Pooley; "we'll all go to his house now, and I'll show you some of the sights of the city on the way."

Arm in arm we sallied forth. Mr. Edward Robison—"Teddie," as Pooley called his old school-fellow—turned out "up to description"; he was one of the right sort. He at once undertook to arrange all we wanted; he would find us passages home, and we were to pay on arrival. He wouldn't even telegraph to Mr. Dexton first.

"This is jolly," said Harry, as we walked back hours afterwards, for Mr. Robison entertained us with true colonial hospitality. "Now we shall be able to take Consett and the fellows at the school,

Rafe, by surprise. Not a soul will know we're coming till we get there."

Nearing Pooley lodgings again, we had to steer into the roadway in order to keep clear of a little crowd that had gathered on the footpath round a big policeman, who appeared to be interrogating somebody, presumably in order to ascertain his name and address.

"An accident, I suppose," observed Pooley, "or a case of 'dwunk and incapable.'"

We were passing on, and in a few seconds should have been out of ear-shot. But just in time we caught the words, uttered in a voice and tone we all knew well—

"I am called the padre, but I don't know who I am."

Without a word we turned and walked back, pushing our way through the laughing crowd up to the side of the big policeman.

Whilst Harry told him that he knew his prisoner—for he was gripping the padre by the elbow—and would be responsible for him, I slipped some coins into his palm.

The big policeman—influenced, we will hope, solely by Harry's words,—instantly released his hold of the padre's arm. I took it within mine, and Harry tucked his other arm within his own left. Pooley kept close to our rear, and in this order we moved quickly away.

"Now, then," said the policeman to those who

remained, some of whom showed a disposition to follow us, "what are you waiting here for? Move on, please."

Gaining the corner of a quieter street, we turned into it.

Speaking to our rescued companion very gently and quietly, we soon elicited the fact that since getting off the ship and wandering along from Williamstown, he had been walking aimlessly about the city, till at last he had been accosted by the suspicious but easily corrupted big policeman, his answers to whom had soon attracted the passers-by.

"Pooley," exclaimed Harry, suddenly, "I wish you'd walk on a bit with the padre. I want to talk to Ralph a minute—about him, you understand."

"Come on, padre," said Pooley, walking him on ahead.

"What is it, Harry?" I asked.

"Well, old man, it's this. What are we to do about the padre?"

"We shall have to tell Captain Arkwright we've found him."

"And what will happen then?"

"I suppose the authorities will take charge of the poor old chap."

"Of course they will, and shut him up. What a pity! He's so quiet and harmless and innocent, and with us he seems to understand almost everything that's going on."

"That's what I can't make out."

"It's the past that floors him. But it seems jolly hard that he should be locked up for the rest of his life just because he can't remember who he is and where he came from. There really seems to be nothing else the matter with him at times; and there's never anything dangerously the matter with him. Although he can't manage it, I'm certain that he often tries to remember who he is, and he'd tell us if he could. I've got an idea that perhaps some day he *will* manage it."

"You've got some plan in your head, Harry."

"I know I have, and it's just this. Let's take charge of the poor old chap—take him to London—take him to some swell doctors there, and see what they can do for him. There's no reason why we should forget that we've got loads of money."

"*You* have, Harry."

"*We* have, Rafe. I don't suppose we shall have control of it till I come of age, but, all the same, Dexton or somebody will have to fork out pretty liberally in the meantime. So why shouldn't we undertake to look after the padre? Little by little we may be able to get some clue from him which will put us on the right track, and then we can advertise in the hope of finding his friends and restoring him to them. And if nobody ever turns up to claim him, let him end his days at Westwood—not in a pauper lunatic asylum!"

"Hadn't I a right to be proud of my chum—my chum Harry? Only it was an awful nuisance that the feeling got in my throat and stuck there, because I wanted to say something, but couldn't.

"I knew you'd agree with me," he went on. "I knew you were not the sort of chap to have any hand in cutting the helpless old man adrift from us and leaving him to his fate, a stranger in a strange city. I counted on your help the moment the idea struck me. I'll put the whole thing in a little different way—put it in a nutshell. Rafe, you have no father, and I have no father. We'll adopt 'the padre'!"

"Adopt him!" I cried.

"Yes, as our father. We'll do what we've often done with our belongings before—share him between us. It's singular that we've always had to call him 'padre.' You'll adopt your half of him?"

"Of course I will."

"Pooley!"

Pooley came hastening back to us, and we hastened to tell him what we'd just agreed to do.

"Hold hard," said he, delighted; "fair play's a jewel, and I don't see why I should be left out of this adopting business. I claim a third share in the concern."

"It's fairly yours," I said, "by the right of conquest."

"So it is," assented Harry. "I know all about the licking you gave that bully on board ship, Pooley. Come on, padre; we'll take care of you. You've got three sons—all of a sudden."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DIRE PERIL.

AT the end of three days—during which we kept our adopted parent “very dark,” for fear he might be taken away, after all—we received a letter from Mr. Robison, in consequence of which we waited upon him at his office.

“I’m expecting the arrival,” he informed us, “of a fine steamer called the *Dusky Bride*. I’ve got to find her a cargo for London, and she’ll sail, by way of the Horn, as soon as she’s full. I know the owners well, and the captain, too, and I shall be able to arrange your business with them all right. The *Dusky Bride* is what we call a tramp, not a regular liner, which will make it all the easier for me to settle matters, and you’ll find her a very comfortable ship. As her cabin accommodation is, of course, limited, you’ll probably have her all to yourselves. I mean that she’s not likely to carry any other passengers.”

“Can she carry a fourth, Mr. Robison?” asked Harry.

“I dare say she could. Why?”

Harry told him about the padre, and of our determination to carry him with us. Mr. Robison looked a little dubious, but promised to let us know.

On New Year's day he summoned us to meet him again.

The *Dusky Bride* had arrived, and was unloading. Her homeward freight was ready for her, and she would sail as soon as she had got it on board, and we could all sail by her. The only formality to be observed was the affixing of Pooley's signature to an already prepared document in the shape of a letter to the owners. Harry wanted to sign as well; and, not to be behind-hand, I also volunteered to adorn the paper with my sign-manual. But we were laughingly reminded that we were only "infants" in the discriminating eyes of the law.

"Let's see, Pooley," said Mr. Robison, a trifle doubtfully, "you *are* twenty-one, aren't you?"

"Of course I am," replied Pooley indignantly, as he added a twenty-three-years'-old flourish to his portentous-looking "Pooley de Vere Pullet."

In a week's time we were warned to get on board, and obeyed the summons with alacrity. At the last moment a hitch occurred—two of the deck hands and several of the firemen failed to turn up. An officer went ashore, and supplied their places with almost anybody he could pick up.

Before we had been at sea twenty-four hours we discovered in one of the substitutes so obtained for the stoke-hole our old and undesirable acquaintance Jacobs. He told us, surlily enough, that he had soon tired of the colony, and had jumped at the chance of working his way home again. The fact was, we had no doubt, that he had squandered in a few days in dissipation such money as he had landed with, and had been obliged to take the first job that offered, whatever it was and wherever it took him.

Poor *Dusky Bride* ! she was on her last voyage.

Five days after losing sight of the North Isle of New Zealand, an alarming accident happened to her machinery. How serious were the mishap and its anticipated consequences was proved by the fact, soon generally known, that it was in discussion to reverse her course and run back for the nearest port, for the engineers reported it to be impossible to repair the damages.

She was actually put about and under sail ; but she carried so little that next to no way was made, and it was obvious, even to landsmen's eyes, that it was exceedingly difficult to steer her.

Almost without warning, a terrible hurricane from the south burst upon the already partially disabled ship. The waves washed over her from stem to stern, and the engine-room was flooded.

There was only one alternative to foundering where she was. Shipping some frightful seas during the manœuvre, her head was worked round, and she drove northward before the storm like a log.

For two nights and two days she kept afloat and held together. In the middle of the third night the end came.

She was going down fast.

Amidst dreadful confusion—for the men had got out of hand—her two uninjured boats were lowered, just escaping being swamped in the process, though the sea was running less high. There might have been room for all had order been maintained.

But it wasn't. The few men who, so to speak, tried to stem the torrent, were carried away in its rush.

Despite all the entreaties of the captain, the men—by far too many of them were Asiatic and other foreigners of a very different stamp from the genuine British sailor—scrambled in where and how they could—scrambled in and put off.

Both the first mate and the second were washed away—and I fear that others shared their fate. At last it seemed that the captain, we four passengers, and the stoker Jacobs were the only souls left on board.

A boat with a gaping hole in her side still swung in one of the davits.

Our chance of escape in it was a faint but the only one.

As we were getting it overside, the padre fell on the slippery deck, just as one of the last big waves of the storm broke over it.

The receding water carried him with it over the battered bulwark before a hand could be stretched out to save him.

"Now in with you, all—quick," cried the captain, as the boat was launched.

Jacobs was first to obey—we followed him, keeping the crazy little craft in which we were to weather the fag-end of the storm close to the rolling side of the sinking ship, for her master's descent: for the descent of the last man to leave her.

Nay, he never left her, for at the moment that he was about to do so, a spar, or some portion of a splintered mast, came crashing down upon his head and felled him to the deck.

"Stand by if you can—shove off if you can't," cried Harry—and he sprang from the boat to the ship and gained the fallen captain's side.

"Shove off!" screamed Jacobs, "she's settling, and the boat will be sucked down with her. Shove off!"

"Stand by, Pooley!" I shouted, and we kept her close in for our chum.

He joined us again quickly enough, but not a moment too soon.

"Dead!" he said, as he grasped an oar.
"Shove off."

We pulled for life.

The *Dusky Bride* gave one mighty lurch, rolled over on her side, and sank from sight forever, her dead master going down with her.

"I shall never forget his last words as long as ever I live," Harry declared afterwards. "He uttered them with more than the bitterness of death in his dying breath. 'I could have done it! I could have done it! I could have done it!' he gasped three times; the last time his voice was only a wail. 'If ever you get to England, tell them I could have done it!—*with a British crew I could have saved the ship and every soul on board!*'"

Harry and I rowed—he on the stroke thwart, I behind him; Pooley baled, the water pouring in as fast as, with cap and hands, he threw it out; Jacobs steered, in an almost vain endeavor to avoid the broadsides of the billows.

With death threatening us at every stroke, we struggled on for about a thousand yards.

Pooley tore off his coat, and stuffed it into the boat's gaping side.

Harry and I, panting for breath, lay on our oars.

A cry rang over the water. A man was drowning close at hand.

We turned our heads. The moon was breaking

through the black clouds. Light was streaming on the blacker waves.

The drowning man who had cried for help was clinging to some of the floating gear of the sunken steamer.

We saw him clearly: quite clearly we saw his face—the white face of the padre.

“Steer for that man!”—and Harry dipped his blade again in a flash.

“I won’t,” refused Jacobs. “The boat’s in danger of swamping every moment as it is, and another man would sink us. We haven’t water and food for ourselves for more than a day or two, and none to spare for another. I see who it is—let the looney drown.”

“Steer for that man!”

“I won’t!”

Already the fellow had jammed the rudder hard against us.

“I won’t. And I say he shan’t be taken aboard, row for him as you like.”

His right hand left the tiller, against which he thrust his back.

The next moment, “Look out, Harry!” I cried, for the long blade of a dagger-like knife glistened between his fingers.

Harry saw it too. In a moment he had lifted his oar from the rowlock. He poised it in his two strong hands, the butt levelled straight for the head of the man who threatened him.

“There’s no room for him, and I say he shan’t be taken aboard this boat.”

“And I say he shall—if I have to knock you out of it to make room for him!”

CHAPTER XIX.

JUST IN TIME.

IT was not a time for words. The life of a drowning man was at stake, and the coward who not only refused to take his part in saving him, but swore that he shouldn't be saved, held a knife in his hand. Anything like a struggle would be almost certain to upset the boat.

Harry Saxon did the best thing that it was possible to do in the circumstances—he cracked the recalcitrant steersman over the skull with the butt end of his oar.

Jacobs' head fell back over the stern-post, and his nasty looking weapon dropped from his senseless fingers.

Pooley picked it up, and threw it away.

A dozen vigorous strokes brought us alongside the wreckage to which the padre was clinging—clinging still, though he had ceased to call for help, ceased all his struggles. We rescued him, but only just in time.

Not till dawn was breaking did either he or Jacobs recover consciousness.

It had been with the utmost difficulty that we had so trimmed the boat as to keep her afloat.

Harry bound up Jacobs' broken forehead as well as he could with his own handkerchief—I believe that even as he bent over him Jacobs would have stabbed him if his knife had been within grasp.

Blazing hot, the sun poured his scorching fire upon us.

All day long, nothing came in sight—no sail of passing ship, no smoke of steamer.

The night fell, and passed away. Again the furnace-fires of the sun reddened the sky, and heated the air till it touched our faces like smoke.

What we had to eat we ate; what we had to drink we drank; when we could sleep we slept.

There were some more days and some more nights, but I don't know how many.

When the end came we were all asleep, or at least insensible.

Each must have known as he dropped off that unless one kept awake to bale, the leaky boat would gradually fill, even in the absolute calm that had followed the storm; but nobody cared. We were too far gone for that. Despair had followed fast on feverish hope—apathy had succeeded delirium.

As a matter of fact, our boat was half-full when she run aground. I think it was more the lapping on my face of the water she had shipped than the

sound of her grating keel on the shingle that woke me.

I clutched a thwart, and struggled to my knees ; and presently I rose to my feet.

I tried to call to Harry and to Pooley—but my throat was too parched, my tongue was too sore, my lips were too blistered.

I touched them, and they moved. I got out a word—one word.

“ Land ! ”

By the time they had roused themselves and risen, with the same difficulty that I had experienced, I had stepped overside, mechanically.

Gradually we realized what had happened. We had been cast ashore on one of the Island Paradises of the Pacific Ocean.

Harry found his voice first.

“ Land ! ” he shouted—it was such a thin, funny shout. “ Land ! Land ! We’re saved ! ”—as he roused up Jacobs and the padre.

We fell, every one of us, again and again as we hauled the boat up high and dry.

The tropical flowers that grew almost to the edge of the golden beach were so bright, the palms were so green, that fresh water must be flowing on the land—pray God not far off.

We had not to seek it : it was brought to us.

For hardly had we turned our faces from the boats before a loudly shouted English hail reached our ears, and a man came running to us.

Without a word from one of us—with only a look at the five of us and another at the knocked-about craft from which we had landed, he seemed to know all that we need have told him.

“Ser-vivors of the *Dusky Bride*, cast away,” he said, cheerily. “All right. Water? Stand by till I bring it.”

He left us, and returned with water. How we drank! “Not wisely but too much;” though every draught seemed to put fresh life into us.

Then we began to ply him with eager questions, painfully spoken. But he stopped us.

“Steady, mates—steady a bit. You’re English?”

“Yes.”

“The lot of you English?”

“Yes.”

“Then I tell you what it is,” he said, making the most astounding and mysterious remark in the most business-like and matter-of-fact manner; “I tell you what it is. You’re all just in time to come in handy for the Resurrection.”

CHAPTER XX.

A SINFUL PARADISE.

FOR the what?" ejaculated Jacobs.

"The resurrection!" cried Harry and I.

"Wesurwection!" echoed Pooley.

"Yus. Ain't yer never 'eard of a resurrection before? You're all in for a reg'ler treat in the way o' one, anyhow. Howsumever, that ain't the first thing to be talked about. What did I say just now when I first clapped my peepers on yer? Why, I looks at yer and the name what's wrote on the boat, and I says, 'Survivers from the *Dusky Bride*, cast away.' That's what *you* are. I'm Davy Jones; honest old Davy Jones they call me. Well, then I says 'Water!' I says it with my tongue, and I says it in my 'eart. Next I alloods to the resurrection. I'll cackle more about that by-and-by. What I says now is Grub! This way for grub. Keep close in my wake."

Just above the beach was a fringe of thick wood, through which we accompanied our loqua-

cious conductor, who kept up his gabbling talk all the time. On the other side of the little wood was a large patch of cultivated ground, beyond which we saw a village of considerable size.

Before we reached it a great crowd came out to meet us. It was evident that we had been seen as we emerged from the thicket. Scores of natives—men, women, and children—rushed up to us, shouting and gesticulating. Besides these—and more leisurely—some half a hundred white men approached us.

But Davy Jones hurried us into almost the first “house” we came to. It was a rather prettily constructed wooden hut, erected on a raised staging of stone, and decorated (outside as well as in) with gayly colored cocoanut plaiting.

The flooring was of lattice-work, on which were piled plenty of native-made mats. Cooking and eating utensils were scattered about, and some bowls of glazed crockery.

“This is my ’ouse,” announced Davy Jones; “you’d better lay down a minute while I go out and kick some natives.”

We sunk on the matted floor as he left the hut—those mats seemed to us as soft as down, though they were not as soft by any means.

Having kicked away the natives, and dispersed, presumably by other means, the curious crowd of white men, our host rejoined us.

“Who says grub? You all says grub, nateral—being sur-vivers. Grub it is.”

He put food before us. We didn't stop to ascertain what it was. It was food, any way ; and we ate it. Jones kept on talking, but I don't think one of us paid the slightest attention to what he was saying, even when we had finished eating. I know that in my own case his voice soon began to sound as though it were a voice very far away. Gradually his words seemed all to run into each other. His voice itself became a drone, and the drone a buzz, as of some gigantic bee humming rather pleasantly, but a long way off—farther and farther off still. Farther and farther off till I heard it no longer.

I had fallen asleep.

When I woke, my companions were awake too, with the exception of the padre, who still slumbered peacefully.

Going to the beaded cloth that did duty for a door, I moved it aside, and saw that the sun was hours later in the sky.

Old Davy Jones—I suppose he had grown tired of talking without any listeners, and had left us to sleep in peace—was returning by himself, but followed at a respectful distance by a mixed mob of the irrepressible natives.

“All awake and spry again?” he asked as he entered the hut—“that's all right. Oh! one of you a-snoozin' still, eh?”

"He don't count," said Jacobs; "he's a looney, and wouldn't have been here at all if I'd had my way."

"A looney, is he? Can he fight?—that's the great thing. He looks pretty fit. I've knowed looneys as was reg'lar greedy for fightin'."

"Fighting!" cried Harry and I.

"Yus—that's what you're all in for, along of the resurrection I alluded to. 'Water!' says I fust to all you sur-vivers; 'resurrection!' says I next; 'grub!' says I third. I says 'em with my tongue, and I says 'em in my 'eart. You've had the water, likewise you've had the grub. Now you're a-goin' for to get some resurrection—fust by way of a explanation, all fair and shipshape and above-board. I'm honest old Davy Jones, I am, and this here's my locker—ha! ha!—where I can talk free. 'Cause why? 'Cause there ain't no monsoos here, a-jibberin' and a-jabberin' and a-domineerin'."

For the first time I took stock of "honest old Davy Jones." He didn't look honest at all. A more villainous looking old rascal—he seemed about sixty—I'd never set eyes on. That he was an Englishman (I should think a Cockney of the purest breed) and a sailor, I regret to say there could be no doubt. His speech proclaimed him one, and his bearing the other. He wore a pair of European boots, blue serge trousers, and a

flannel shirt. A huge palm leaf was stuck on the back of his head by way of a hat.

Returning no direct answer to the rapid questionings of Harry, Pooley, and myself, but waiving them aside with a general promise that we should soon understand "heverythink," he proceeded to enlighten us slowly in his own long-winded fashion.

"This here place what you sur-vivers have drifted to is a Yighland," he began. "As to what sort of a Yighland it is, you'll be able to see for yourselves by a-navigatin' of it—of course if so be as you comes out sur-vivers from the resurrection as well as the *Dusky Bride*. What its name is put down as on the chart I don't know, but the cussed Ka-knackers, as we calls the natives, says it's Te Omahao—which means in their lingo 'the spot where it's always sunshine'—so if yer like for to call it Sunny Yighland, you're welcome and free so for to do, mates.

"Very well. Now who's on the Yighland, and how did we come here? This is all a-leadin' up to the resurrection, so don't get unpatient.

"Besides me, and o' course leavin' the Ka-knackers out o' the reckonin', there's about a 'undred whites. Of these here 'undred whites, a good sixty is French monsoos; the rest is English, with a small sprinklin' of Yanks.

"As to how we all come here, well, that yarn might be called a warious yarn, in a manner of

speakin'. But having got here, one way and another—various, as I said—there don't seem none of us as wants for to leave. 'Cause why? 'Cause we've got here most heverythink we want—wives and baccy inclooded: and we don't never have to put a 'and to work—not anything to speak of. The Ka-knackers does all the work, as is nateral. Some come here original same as you—sur-vivers; some found their way here a' puppose, for to escape 'angin', and prison, and sich like."

I put the speaker down as belonging to the second lot, but didn't say anything.

"But howsumever we come, we should all be a reg'ler 'appy fam'ly together if it wasn't for the Frenchies. The Frenchies say as they was here fust, and they goes on a-dominatin' over us Englishmen in a way as is enough for to make our blood bile. It do make it bile. They claim as the Yighland is theirs. Just look here, and I'll show you."

Standing at the doorway—from which a number of natives who had crept up unseen scuttled away—he pointed to a larger building in the centre of the village, from the roof of which drooped lazily the folds of the French tri-color.

"Look at that now! It's a insult to us Englishmen, that's what it is—a insult. I says it with my tongue, and I says it in my 'eart. It's a insult! Suppose they *was* here fust—what o' that? That's only a accident, any way. We

should have been here before them if they hadn't been here before us. A Englishman always prigs a country fust unless some cussed foreigner's been before him. These French monsoos has got the best things in the Yighland—the best 'uts and heverythink. Besides a-priggin' the best of heverythink, and besides a-domineerin' and a-dominatin' over *us*, they treats the poor natives shameful.

“Wait half a jiffey,” he broke off; “I can make out three Ka-knacker women a-hidin' behind them trees—stowed away so as to be 'andy to crawl up again and come intrudlin' into our conversation by a-listenin' to it. As I was a-sayin', these French monsoos treats the poor natives shameful. Just stand by while I go and kick them three gals out o' their skins, and I'll go on explainin' to you.”

He dived forward with a rush to the spot he had indicated, and commenced laying about him with his foot; but, half-screaming and half-laughing, the eavesdroppers fled from him untouched.

Sending a volley of oaths after them, the chivalrous Davy Jones rejoined us, and resumed his observations.

“As I was remarkin'—with my tongue and in my 'eart, equal—these disgustin' Frenchies claims as they're the howners of the Yighland, and every now and again they're sort of backed up by a French gun-boat as comes a-sailin' in here as bold

as brass. She's called the *Repub-lick-you*—spelt all wrong with a 'q'!"

This was too much. Harry, Pooley, and I looked at each other, and broke into a roar of laughter that, in our weak condition, soon exhausted us. But "*Repub-lick-you*" for *République* was more than we could stand.

Our laughter awoke the padre. Harry walked up to him, and placed more water and a little more food by his side, speaking to him soothingly the while in an undertone. Tom Jacobs availed himself of the pause to indulge in a few confidential asides with Jones. I believed that he divined already what was coming. The older man appeared a good deal taken aback at the hilarity which had so unexpectedly interrupted him. In fact, for some moments he seemed disposed to be resentful, but evidently thought better of it, for it wasn't long before he continued his harangue as though it had never been broken off.

"After the very fust visit of this *Repub-lick-you*, we came to blows with the monsoos, on account of them being cockier than ever. They crowed and strutted about like bantams on a dung-hill, and him what crowed the loudest then is a-crow-ing the loudest now—and so he will do till his neck's twisted."

This last remark was emphasized—apparently unconsciously—by a horrible twitching and screwing of the speaker's sinewy fingers.

“This here Jooles Ferdernong as I’m alloodin’ to is the ’ead man on their side—I’m boss on ours. Well, I snaps my fingers at this here Jooles—so—and I says ‘Waterloo!’ says I, with my tongue and in my ’eart. Jooles he ups and calls me a canal. Now, I wasn’t going to be called a canal by any Froggy Frenchman, livin’ or dead; so I ’its him in the jawr. He strikes me in the stum-mick with his foot, as was a insult, and painful.

“It ended by all the Englishmen going for all the Frenchmen, the Yanks joinin’ in on our side.

“Waterloo wasn’t in it with the lickin’ as we give ’em, me being the Dook o’ Wellington. But the lickin’ didn’t make no difference in the matter o’ their cockiness. They still said as Sunny Yighland was theirs, and continued for to behave as such. ‘The Yighland’s yours, is it?’ I says; ‘we’ll see about that.’

“Without no more to-do, being a bit of a scholard, as you must have took note, I sits down and drewed up a partition to the British Govingment.”

“You dwew up what?” said Pooley.

“A partition to the British Govingment.”

“A petition to the Bwedish Government!”

“Yus, a-askin’ the Queen to give Jooles Ferder-nong one in the eye by priggin’ the Yighland herself—makin’ it a reg’ler British persession, with me as governor.

“I drewed up that partition proper—I guess

the Queen don't often get one like it. It was signed and crossed all over, and sent aboard the fust ship that got far enough out of her course to be signalled from the beach. We told 'em to post it, and they promised faithful, but we ain't never had a answer.

"The Frenchies knowed about the partition, and for everlastin' they're a-chippin' us about not gettin' no answer. They've growed unbearable, and a end has got to be put to their unbearableness, once for all. And now's the time, for 'tain't long since the *Repub-lick-you* was here, and she ain't due back again for another six months. We couldn't do it if the *Repub-lick-you* was here, with her sojers and sailors and guns."

"Couldn't do what?"

"What we're a-goin' to do. What's as good as done now we've got you five Englishers to join in. Us Englishmen is a-goin' for to rise in resurrection again' the French!"

"Rise in insurrection?" exclaimed Harry.

"Call it *insurrection* if you like—I prefers a Bible word myself," said Davy Jones piously.

He lowered his voice and spoke in deadly, unmistakable earnest, his villainous face distorted by genuine passion.

"The job's to be done at night. We've got more arms than they know of. We're going to creep on 'em like panthers, and slit the throat of every mother's son of 'em before he can wake.

Then the whole place is ours, and no mistake, with all they've got out of it.

“Now you know what you five has got to take part in.

“For *that's* the Resurrection!”

CHAPTER XXI.

PASSING THE WORD.

POOLEY was the first to speak; in fact, he opened his mouth as soon as Davy Jones closed his.

"Your plot's a neat little thing," he observed coolly; "it stwikes me as being worthy of you, Jones."

"Thank 'ee," said Davy Jones heartily, accepting the dubious compliment in good faith.

"But one point seems to have escaped your calculation."

"What's that?"

"Just this—suppose all goes off well, without any hitch, and you collah the island all sewene, what are you going to do when the Fwench man-o'-war does come back, with its soldiers and sailors and guns?"

"Bless yer soul, we ain't forgot that. We're a-goin' to put it all down to the Ka-knackers; and they'll cop it 'ot, they will. We're a-goin' to say as they done it all."

He proceeded to entertain us by a recital of all the details of the plot in progress.

There is no need for me to repeat the particulars in similar detail: suffice it to say that they proved the grim sincerity of the conspirators, and that the whole thing had been deliberately thought out.

"Now that you've come," said Jones again, "we're ready for 'em—ripe for action."

"*We're* not fit for much action yet, and shan't be for a day or two," remarked Pooley.

Harry and I had said very little: we knew that Pooley was talking with a purpose, and that his apparent sympathy with Jones's murderous scheme was simulated. As for Jacobs, he had confined himself to a few careful inquiries concerning the personal risks which would have to be incurred.

I was very anxious to break up the conference.

Looking out of the hut, "The sun's getting low," I said; "and we shall be all the better for turning in early and turning out late."

"Come on, then," responded Davy; "I've got you a house all to yourselves, where you can have such a snooze as you ain't had lately. How long do you reckon you was adrift? Wasn't nobody else saved but you five?"

We returned short answers to these and other questions as we accompanied him to the house we were to occupy.

We found it a larger building than the one we

had left. It was divided into three compartments, screened off from each other by cocoanut matting. We ascertained subsequently that it had been secured for our accommodation by the simple expedient of kicking out its legitimate Kanaka proprietors.

“Here you are, all snug and comfortable. I’ll be round an hour or two after sun-up, to show you how to get your own breakfast, and interjooce you to the other whites. They’re curious to make yer acquaintance, and you’ve got to thank me for keepin’ of ’em off to-day. I knowed what you wanted—water, grub, and sleep, not company. I’ve been a sur-viver myself. Howsumever, most of ’em come and had a good look at you while you was asleep.”

We slept till the sun was high next day. We might have slept till it sank and rose again, but for Davy Jones’s insistence in shaking us into wakefulness.

Under his guidance we made further acquaintance with the island and its inhabitants.

The island itself was what I have called it: it was an earthly Paradise. Springs of clear water bubbled in the midst of greenest verdure. Spreading trees cast circles of grateful shadow; vegetables and luscious fruits abounded.

The more we saw the more we marvelled at the wondrous beauty of the scenes that met our gaze at every turn. Nature had been prodigal

in gifts of all her good things to this favored isle of the southern seas.

But alas! she had spread her pearls before swine. The natives, quiet and inoffensive as they seemed, were only a few stages removed from their original savagery. The good lessons they had learned from missionaries, who occasionally visited them, were worse than neutralized by the example of the white men resident amongst them. English and French alike, they were a cut-throat gang.

Mixing with them after our partial inspection of the island they lived in, I could not help being reminded of good Bishop Heber's words in reference to scenes—

“Where ev'ry prospect pleases,
And only man is vile.”

In the course of a few days we thoroughly understood the position of affairs between the Frenchmen and the other white men.

Jones had stated that position accurately enough. The French were arrogant. Their leader, Jules Ferdinand—a handsome, graceful but graceless scoundrel whom, on learning his name, we identified as the “Jooles Ferdernong” of old Davy's narrative—assumed the airs of a Governor-General. He was particularly bump-tious just now, owing to the recent visit of the

République. We were told that her visits always confirmed the French in their view that the island belonged to their nation, and always increased their irritating assertiveness, as a natural consequence.

Harry, Pooley, and I—with, of course, Jacobs—were taken fully and freely into the counsels of the English party, with whom were the few Americans. Their confidence was forced upon us. Considering their number and unanimity we ceased to wonder at the fearlessness with which Davy Jones had told us of the pending “resurrection.” What could we do against so many?

Our acquiescence in their plans was taken for granted, though we noticed that for the first day or two strict, though quiet, precautions were taken to prevent us from mingling alone with the “other side.” This was all the easier to prevent in consequence of the circumstance that the two “colonies” occupied separate quarters; the dwelling which had been handed over to us was in the rear of the English quarters, through which we had to pass to reach the French quarters. But it seemed to us that nobody really suspected us but Jacobs, whose adhesion to the scheme in hand appeared to be beyond question genuine. He had assured himself that his precious carcass would be in little danger, and had been promised both the native wife and the house of one of the “monsoos” as soon as “the job was over.”

The Frenchmen had the best houses and the prettiest wives, and a general distribution of both was to take place among the victors after the "resurrection" had been brought to a successful termination.

Very little notice was taken of the padre. It soon became understood that he would do what Harry, Pooley, and I told him to do, but that in other respects he was a nonentity.

Almost every one of the whites—French, English, and American—had a weapon of some sort: either a war weapon of native fashioning, or a European arm of even more formidable capacities. The French being quite as well off in this respect as the insurrectionists—better, for they had some quick-firing rifles of modern design, doubtless obtained through their men-o'-war compatriots—and being much more numerous, the great idea amongst the latter continued to be that of a night surprise. At last the only thing that remained to be settled was the actual night and time of the attack. Everybody was to be prepared any night at any time.

The word was to be passed by Davy Jones.

The meeting at which the arrangements were brought to this critical point took place in the morning. In the afternoon Harry and Pooley and I had a long and earnest consultation between ourselves. Most of the points discussed we had gone over before many a time.

In the first place each one of us was determined to have no hand in the dirty work to be done. It had been with the utmost difficulty that we had prevented ourselves from expressing openly our disgust and horror. The chief question was, Ought we not now to warn Jules Ferdinand and his party? Hitherto we had refrained from seeking an opportunity of doing so, because of our conviction that to let them know of what was contemplated against them would simply be to give them the signal to forestall the amiable intentions of their enemies by starting a general massacre of the latter on their own account. The feud between the two parties was of long standing; on several occasions the smouldering fires of mutual jealousy and detestation had flared out into flame. Life had been taken, and the "bad blood" on both sides was now at a feverish temperature. Much was said by Davy Jones and his confederates about "revenge"—but we saw quite sufficient indication that the French considered themselves equally entitled to that luxury. To warn them might be not to prevent but to increase bloodshed.

What were we to do? What was it our duty to do?

We had spoken in low and guarded tones all the time—we ceased to speak, as a slight sound outside fell on our ears.

A Kanaka entered. He had come from Jones.

He brought us three revolvers of rather antiquated pattern. Into the barrel of one of them a note was stuffed:

“The reserrekshun will brake hout twonite. Be reddy.”

Davy Jones had passed the word!

CHAPTER XXII.

“FOREWARNED, FOREARMED!”

WHATEVER we decided to do we must do quickly. But we went over almost all the old ground again before the suggestion upon which we resolved to act occurred to Harry Saxon.

“I think I see at last what we ought to do,” he exclaimed. “I’m afraid the only chance of stopping wholesale murder lies in what I’m going to propose. To tell Ferdinand all would be to make the look-out worse than ever. But if, when the attacking party creep up to the French quarters to-night, they find their intended victims on the alert instead of sleeping, ten to one they’ll funk the whole thing—for the present, at least—and make off before they’re perceived. To postpone the outbreak is all we can hope to do, I’m afraid; but that’s a good deal better than doing nothing.”

“Yes, but how do you propose to give Ferdinand the tip to be on guard to-night, Harry?” I asked.

"We'll write him a note—to send it by the padre will be the safest way—asking him to meet one of us on the beach at sundown. Then whichever of us meets him will say just sufficient, and not a word more. If they only show plenty of lights at night our plan's bound to succeed. I believe that would be enough."

"The note had better be in Fwench," suggested Pooley. "In case of its falling into the wrong hands by any unlikely accident not one of Davy Jones's lot would then be able to understand a word of it."

"Good. I fancy you're the best French scholar. Pooley—Ralph and I were always weak on the lingo when it came to writing it."

A pencil and a piece of paper were found, and Pooley wrote the message. It lay on the table before us while we explained to the padre what we wanted him to do with it. Just as we finished giving him his simple instructions the door cloth was thrust noiselessly aside, and Tommy Jacobs entered.

How long had he been listening outside?

"You've heard the news," he said, glancing at the pistols.

"Yes."

"Them barkers are only to be used if it can't be helped. The job's got to be done silent, if possible."

"So we understood."

He picked up the pistols, and examined them. He stayed in the room for several minutes, and then strolled out.

"The padre had better get off at once," cried Harry. "Where's that note—it was on the table. Have you got it, Rafe?"

"No," replied I.

"Nor I," said Pooley.

The note had gone.

"That scoundrel Jacobs must have been playing the spy on us, and he's taken the letter to back up his report of what he heard. We're done for!"

"No, we're not!" shouted Pooley. "I'll go after him and get it back if I have to kill him for it!"—and he rushed into the open.

"Harry," I said excitedly, "you're right. If Jacobs has got that note, and overheard us, we're done for. Pooley thrashed him on board ship, and you broke his skull in the boat. He's only been waiting his chance to get level with both of you. Now he's got it."

We hurried from the hut, but Pooley was out of sight, and, taking a wrong direction to follow him, it was fully half an hour before he reappeared, walking towards us.

"I've missed him," he explained hurriedly, "but ran right against Ferdinand. I didn't stop, but managed to tell him in passing to be on the shore just after the sun went down. I'm certain he understood."

We continued our search after Jacobs together, and came upon him suddenly, considerably later, in the midst of some half a dozen of the others, with whom was Davy Jones himself. They were talking of the coming night's work, and Jones called to us to join them, and gave us his last instructions.

It was evident that Jacobs had said nothing, shown nothing. Our fears appeared to be groundless, after all. We returned considerably relieved.

It was now late in the afternoon.

With scarcely an interval of twilight down went the sun, and the shadows of the tropical night fell on all the island.

Harry sallied out to keep the appointment that Pooley had made with Jules Ferdinand. Sooner than we expected he came back.

"It's a funny thing," he said, "and I can't make it out. Ferdinand professes that he can't understand me, but he keeps on saying, 'All to come—one, two, t'ree, four—t'ree young, one old nan—all to come. Please all to come.' It's plain enough what he means, but why does he mean it?"

Pooley and I shared Harry's perplexity—I might say his misgivings—but we all came to the same conclusion that there was nothing for it but to comply with the Frenchman's request.

Accordingly, taking the padre with us, we turned

out in company as though going for a stroll in the cool of the evening.

"But I'm afraid there's more in this than meets the optic," was the opinion expressed by Pooley more than once.

Arrived on the lonely beach, we found Jules Ferdinand still waiting at the secluded spot which had been selected for the rendezvous. Greeting us with native elegance and politeness, he slightly drew us off, so that our backs were turned to the dark fringe of wood that skirted the upper sands.

The next moment each one of us was gripped by strong hands from behind. Before we could turn our mouths were gagged, our arms were strapped close to our sides, and our legs fettered with rope below the knees.

All this was done with almost incredible rapidity. Speechless and helpless we stood surrounded by a knot of Frenchmen—all of whom save Ferdinand must have sprung upon us from the darkness of the thicket.

"Gentlemen," said Jules Ferdinand, "we t'ank you for your intentions so considerate. But already we know not a leetle but all of it. We are told of all of it by your Monsieur Tommee Ja-cob!"

No wonder Jacobs had not betrayed us to the men he had sold to the French. He had a deeper

game than that to play. He had made his own terms with Ferdinand, and—as we gathered afterwards—they were stiff ones.

We never had any doubt but that the treatment meted out to us was inspired by his instigation, though probably the natural suspiciousness of the French character had a good deal to do with it. Still gagged and bound, we were carried off by a devious route (to avoid falling in with any of our countrymen) to the dwelling of Jules Ferdinand—the building from which the tricolor floated all day long. Here our mouths were ungagged and our limbs unbound, but—

“You are prisonaires,” said Ferdinand; “you have told us so leetle—you have only say ‘go not to sleep to-night; burn lights to-night’; while Tommee Jacob, he have told us all. And also he has said not to trust you—that you are a blind, a trap. Here you are safe; you can do no harm. But if we had not brought you, if we had left you for Davee Jones, then Davee Jones would have made you fight us, whether your stomachs big for fight or vare leetle. Much better, then, that you are here.

“I shall tell you,” he went on pleasantly, “what will happen—happen to-night. We show no lights, not a leetle glimmer. We are go-to-bed; we are sleeping. Ha! ha! we are sleeping fast with eyes all wide open. Presently Davee Jones and all his rascal English but you come creep,

creep, creeping up—right up here. Tommee Jacob first show dem just where best to come, where French houses all close togeddar, 'dis best place' he say. But himself, he run back. They come. We are ready—ha! ha! ha! we are quite ready. Every Frenchman ready at doorway. Rifles, pistols, all ready too. They come soft, but we hear, for we are listening—we see, for we are looking. I watch for the grand moment. It makes itself to arrive. I give a sound. It is the sign—'shoot! shoot! shoot!' One volley, two volley, t'ree volley—ah! it is grand; it is beautiful. Full up to de top with dead Englishmen shall be what you call de locker of Davee Jones!"

More powerless for peace than ever, we could do now absolutely nothing. Our one move had been made, and had proved a failure. What must be must be.

Presently Jules Ferdinand was joined by several of his neighbors. It was arranged between them that at least three Frenchmen should occupy each doorway, so that the volleys might be more concentrated, if, as was hoped, "the enemy" came up in close order.

In silence and in darkness remained the French settlement till half the night had passed away. We began to think that our absence had aroused suspicion, and to hope that the attack would not be made, after all. But suddenly a short, sharp,

loud hiss, heard as distinctly in the still air as a cry would have been, told that the moment for action had arrived.

Jules Ferdinand had given the signal to open fire !

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACOBS' CHANCE.

A VOLLEY—a second volley—the third. A babel of yells, screams, curses, oaths, and groans proclaimed that the French had not aimed at the approaching dark and confused body of men without hitting some of them. All the return fire that was attempted was in the way of a few straggling shots which hit nobody, but which were quickly enough replied to.

Then all was over, for the French had no idea of leaving the shelter of their houses and making a sortie. They did not even make any move to ascertain, by an examination of the ground, how much damage they had probably inflicted. As for the attackers, nothing more was seen or heard of them—no further alarm disturbed the stillness of the night. Finding that their intended victims had been by some means forewarned, and had taken good care to be forearmed, they had evidently abandoned their attempt for the present, beating a precipitate retreat.

To do them justice, they carried away both their dead and wounded with them.

As many of the jubilant Frenchmen as could get into Ferdinand's house foregathered there—and how they talked, how they gesticulated! And how they exaggerated!

"Waterloo is avenged," muttered Harry in a low voice, for the visitors had overflowed into the inner apartment to which we had been conducted before the commencement of the brief and unequal conflict.

"We have been ear-witnesses to the Sedan of Gweat Bwitin," was Pooley's comment.

The padre—as usual—said nothing. At the first sound of the firing he had sprung to his feet, betraying an unwonted agitation, which we had had some little difficulty in calming. It was not, indeed, till the firing had altogether ceased that he sank back into his usual condition of childlike placidity.

"Never mind about Waterloo and Sedan," said I; "what I'm thinking about is just this—what are these jabbering Frenchmen going to do with us?"

"They're excited enough to do anything," observed Harry.

"They're wapidly losing contwol of themselves."

Pooley was quite right. Ferdinand had been doing honor to the occasion by dispensing a

horrible drink of Kanaka concoction with a free hand; and the effects of his hospitality were becoming very apparent.

Nobody thought of lying down or of taking any rest. The breaking of the dawn found them carousing still, and talking more quickly than ever—though less coherently.

At last there came a pause in the hubbub: for several minutes the drinking went on in almost complete silence.

When the talk began again, we were the subjects of it. Most of it going on in the next room, we heard little, but what we did hear was the reverse of reassuring.

Harry stood nearest to the hangings that divided the two rooms, listening.

"Are they going to kill us, Harry?" I whispered.

He beckoned me to keep silence. Presently he came nearer.

"The general view seems to be in favor of simply kicking us out. They might just as well kill us themselves; for if they turn us out how can we hide from that old scoundrel Jones, and what sort of explanation would satisfy him? We were absent last night, and somebody had told the French all about the plans of his precious insurrection. Nothing will make him believe that *we* didn't give him away: and he'll make short work of us."

Some ominous words here fell on our ears from the adjoining apartment ; we recognized the voice of Jules Ferdinand. It was quite clear that he bore us no gratitude for the warning we had given him last night. The full information previously given him by Jacobs had rendered our hint of danger valueless, and Jacobs had satisfied him that we had only been trying to play a double game, and were not to be trusted.

The deliberations as to our fate were cut short by an extraordinary and unexpected occurrence.

Loud shouts from outside penetrated the house. Cries of alarm rose from the French quarters. We rushed into the larger front room to find Ferdinand and all his companions there seizing their arms again. The matting was flung back from the doorway, and a curious sight presented itself.

Some five hundred yards off stood a crowd of trembling Kanakas—men, women, and children. Behind them, towering inches above the tallest of them, but ready to duck his head so as to avail himself of the shelter of their bodies at the first sign of danger, stood the redoubtable Davy Jones, fluttering, as a flag of truce, a shirt that had once been white.

He was yelling “ Truce ! a truce, a truce ! ” with all his might. He had evidently come to open negotiations of some sort, and was driving the mob of natives before him as a bodyguard

to receive the first attentions of the enemy, and to serve as a buttress against their bullets in case his shirt was not respected.

"A truce, a truce!"

"Truce?" roared Ferdinand.

"Yus. I says it with my tongue, and I says it in my 'eart. Have you got four English chaps there what have deserted from us?"

"What if we have?"

"But have yer?"

"Yes, we have."

"Then give 'em up. Give 'em up, and I take my hoath I'll do two things. I'll hang them four chaps, and I'll stop the resurrection. I says it with my tongue, and I says it in my 'eart!"

A shouted conversation was carried on for several minutes. Ferdinand wanted to impose various conditions to our surrender, but the other would not hear of them.

"My fellows won't agree to nothing else," he yelled. "But you give them chaps up, and we swear we'll hang 'em, and then take peaceable the licking you give us last night."

"You shall hang dem where we can see de fun?" asked a Frenchman of a sportive turn of mind.

Jones looked about him.

"Yus," he answered pointing to a convenient tree.

"Rafe—Pooley," whispered Harry, "it's all

up. Poor old padre!—but we can't save him any more than we can save ourselves. There's one thing that we can do, however."

"What's that?"

"We can make a rush of it, and get at Jones while he stands there by himself. The natives will scatter like chaff, and if I can only get at Jones before the others come up and join him, I don't think *he*'ll see the hanging."

Pooley and I held our breath.

"What do you say? Shall we do it?"

"Yes," we replied, in low, firm tones, just as Ferdinand cried—

"All right. You can have dem!"

"Then *now*! Take the padre's arm on your side, Rafe. *Now*!"

We made the dash. The volatile Frenchmen laughed loudly as the scared natives scattered left and right.

But we were too late to reach Davy Jones by himself. Already he had signalled to his rear—and we only ran into the arms of a score of his gang who had hurried up to join him. He shouted to Ferdinand something to the effect that the "court-martial" wouldn't last long, and amidst guffaws from both sides we were led away. The French seemed to be entering into the "fun" of the gruesome entertainment promised and already begun, and to be quite willing to suspend hostilities,

A ring was formed in the centre of the English quarter. Davy Jones took his seat in the middle, and we were stood up in front of him. Of all the angry faces that glared upon us none was quite so cruel as the face of Jacobs, who stood behind the one chair in the middle of the ring.

Jones delivered an address in his best style.

"What happened last night, maties," he said, "is knowed by all of us.

A number of oaths—chiefly from men whose rough bandages showed that they had been wounded—expressed every sympathy with this preamble.

"Likewise it is knowed who turned traitors. They stands before us. But as there ain't nothin' like going through a job of this sort in a stric' perfessional way, I calls on Tommy Jacobs for to give evidence."

I saw a gleam of hope. Jacobs would report the conversation he had overheard, he would produce the note he had picked up. But how he would get over the question "Why did you not reveal all this in time to prevent the disastrous attack that was made?"

Alas! he must have got over the difficulty already somehow, for it was certain that whatever he was going to say now he had said before.

His variation of truth was artful enough. It amounted to a suppression of the real facts altogether.

"What I said to some of you, maties, as soon as it flashed upon me, I say again now formal to all. This here is my evidence.

"In case of meeting any Frenchies out late last night as might have give a alarm, we strolled out mostly separate, forming gradual into two parties. I led one party, and Boss Jones here led the other one. When them two parties joined, one coming one way and the other one another way, the prisoners was missing. I'd calculated they was with Boss Jones, and Boss Jones he calculated as they was with me. They wasn't with either. But this didn't come out till we compared notes afterwards, when we found as neither of us hadn't picked 'em up. Being in the dark, and all anxious to get on the job, we didn't count heads or answer names. We got at our work at once—and we all know what happened."

Again there was a sympathetic murmur of choice oaths. Jacobs proceeded, speaking more rapidly and apparently under greater excitement :

"Who could it be who betrayed us except the fellows who wasn't with us? Who they was as wasn't with us we soon found out."

"By comparing of notes as aforesaid," put in Davy Jones with a presidential air.

"Something flashed upon me like lightning that I hadn't thought of at the time. It was this. Soon after sundown yesterday I come on Ferdinand skulking about on the beach. Ten minutes

afterwards I spotted these four prisoners all walking together in the direction of the beach, though it didn't strike me then where they might be going. But it struck me sharp enough when the question was: 'Who are the traitors?'

"I was down on the shore with the first streak o' light this morning. Near a lot o' footprints above the tidemark I picked up this note, as I say must have been wrote by the prisoners to Jules Ferdinand, who must have dropped it unawares. I say they wrote to him, met him, told him, and went with him to where we've just brought 'em from. And I say we've got evidence enough to hang forty men, let alone a stripling, two boys, and a looney."

Simultaneously Harry, Pooley, and I sprang for the coward who was taking our lives away by putting his own doings upon our shoulders. But stronger hands than ours were clapped upon us. We were as helpless as birds in the snare of the fowler.

Jacobs' motives were easy to understand. He had the double opportunity of diverting all danger of suspicion being attracted in his own direction, and of paying off old scores at the same time.

His chance had come, and he was taking it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SENTENCED TO DEATH.

“G I’ me that there letter,” said Davy Jones. “This here dockymment,” he went on, spreading out the note with both hands, “is wrote in French. Now there ain’t one of us as can read it all through, or a ’arf through, or a quarter through. But ’most every one of us can understand a word here or a word there—there’s about a word apiece. My word is ‘voo’: I know that French word intimate. The prisoners have spelt it wrong with a ‘u’ and a ‘s’—it ought to be wrote with a ‘v’ and a ‘o’ and a ‘o.’ But they can’t get over me with a dodge like that. Voo is the word they meant, and it stands for *you*. And here’s the word just before it—likewise spelt wrong. This here’s Jim Mason’s word. It’s vooley, and means *will*; vooley vous, *will you*? Follering close on is a word spelt evident so remarkable wrong that it can’t be spoke, but Joe Slutch he says it siggerfies *meet*. I *think* this here was your word, Joe?”

Joe modestly admitted that it was.

"Very good. Well, one word at a time, we've pieced this dockymment together, and it's undoubted a traitery appointment. Now, who wrote it?"

"I did," said Pooley.

"*We* wrote it," said Harry quickly.

"Don't you interrupt me in my summin' up," roared the president savagely. "It will be over soon enough—I'm a-summin' up dead agin you. But you heard that, mates?—you heard these two prisoners own up that they wrote this here French dockymment?"

"Of course we did," replied a number of angry voices.

"What's the use of all this evidence?" demanded the fellow who had been appealed to as Joe Slutch. "Hang 'em!"

"Hang 'em!" chorused all the crowd.

"There's been too much jaw already," declared somebody. "What's the good of all this summin' up? We've had enough of it."

Davy Jones looked very grieved, but his attempted remonstrances at the cutting short of the exercise of his judicial functions were drowned in the terrible cry, taken up again by everybody, and swelling higher and higher—"Hang them! Hang them!"

"Listen!"

Above all the din rang Harry Saxon's voice.

"Listen!"

A silence, more startling than all their shouts, fell upon the murderous mob.

"We know that nothing we can say will avail to save us from our fate; so on that score we will say nothing."

"Nothing!" said Pooley.

"Nothing!" said I, trying to speak as firmly as he and Harry spoke.

"But the man on whose head lies the bloodshed of last night—the man who sold you at his own price, and who will sell you again if he can get a price again—stands there!" and, without a quiver or a shake, Harry's hand pointed straight at our chief accuser.

Jacobs faced the perhaps expected charge boldly.

"Is there a man here who's got a word to say agin me?"

"No, Jacobs! No, no!"

"Then let's go on with the hanging. It's time such lying tongues was stopped."

Again a yell of acclamation—again the fierce, hoarse cry of "Hang them! Hang them!" But again, with the same word and the same gesture, brave-hearted, lion-hearted Harry Saxon imposed the same sudden silence.

This time his voice faltered, and all the look of defiance died from his face—the defiance that just before had dared death so dauntlessly. His

hands trembled a little as, standing between Pooley and myself, he first touched us and then moved close to the padre and put them upon him lovingly.

"We don't ask anything for ourselves—we know you mean to do your worst. But spare this old man—this poor old man! In whatever you think we did, you know that he could have had no wilful share, either in planning or executing, either in thought or deed. Spare him—don't harm him! You know his affliction. God has laid his hand upon him—keep your hands off!"

"No!" said the padre.

It was so seldom he spoke at all that we marvelled to hear him now—and marvelled more greatly at what he said, in the low, quiet tones we had never known to vary.

"No—what they do to you let them do to me. I know—I understand. You have been kind to me, you have been good to me—you, and you, and you. You have saved me before—you would save me now. But no! When they kill you let them kill me. It will be easier to die with you than to live without you—I am so strange, so helpless. Till now, I had forgotten what death meant—but now I understand, I know. And perhaps afterwards—when death is over—perhaps afterwards I shall learn again who I am—learn again all I have lost."

The burst of inhuman laughter, the inhuman jeers, that showed his placid voice had reached the inhuman ears of the men who now hemmed us closely in had an effect upon Harry which nothing else had had. They moved him as no sense of his own impending fate had moved him. He gave one despairing, wandering look into the cruel, evil, pitiless, mocking faces around him—and broke down sobbing as never had I known him to in all the close intimacy of our more than friendship.

With dry but distressed and distressing face, the padre tried to comfort him.

It was more than we could bear—Pooley and I turned our heads, and gulped down our own great sobs.

“Well, now, if the old gennelman would really like to die so’s to learn who he is, *I* say—a-sayin’ of it with my tongue and in my ’eart—as it wouldn’t be kind for to stand in his way. But I leave it to you, mates, I leave it to you. Shall he croak or not? Of course, if we don’t hang him with the others it’ll sort of throw us out in our calculations. We cert’n’ly reckoned on the four of ’em. And to my way of thinkin’,” concluded Jones, with the air of a connoisseur, “four of ’em would make a neater job of it than three. Strung up nice and tidy, four, as is a even number, would look prettier than three, as is a odd number.”

“The four—the four ; hang the four !”

Four lengths of rope were brought and made ready. With the ends left trailing on the ground four nooses were thrown around our necks.

CHAPTER XXV.

“TIME’S UP!”

I FEEL quite certain that David Jones had only one motive in staying the rush that would have carried us with it to instant execution. That motive was as utterly cruel as it was entirely selfish. Our torture was a joy to him—so he wanted to prolong both for a little while.

“Not *quite* so fast, mates,” he cried; “slow up for half a jiffy. What I says is, let’s give ’em a quarter of a hour.”

“What for?” demanded Jacobs, who evidently grudged us even this brief respite.

“Yes, what for?” echoed other voices.

“Just for ’em to take a last look round like on this here beautiful world as they’re about for to say adoo to. Now that it’s settled what we’re a-going to do with ’em, I says with my tongue and says in my ’eart, let’s do it, but do it merciful. Give ’em a quarter of a hour for any such private dewotions as they may care to go in for. I was brought up strict religious myself, and I’ve got a

touch of the weakness left. I say, give 'em a quarter of a hour, just fifteen minutes by my watch, for a last look round, and a last think, and some last dewotions—if dewotions is considered agreeable by 'em."

He had his way in spite of Jacobs' angry protestations. We were to die in a quarter of an hour. We all tried to bear ourselves as bravely as we could. In face of the death to which every rapid moment brought us nearer, and in face of the men who had doomed us to that death, we tried not to show the white feather of fear.

Least moved of the four was the padre, though his face bore the old troubled look that was associated with all his puzzled attempts to think.

As for me, though the present seemed strangely vivid—though I noted with exaggerated interest, so to speak, such little things as the flight of a brilliantly feathered bird, the flitting of a winged insect from one gaudy flower to another, the changing position of a bank of white clouds that were drifting across the blue sky—though I even tried to count the colors of the bird's plumage, and wondered how it was that the busy insect didn't grow tired, and fashioned in fancy the white clouds in the blue sky into more fantastic shapes—yet all the while I was living the past over again. My thoughts went back to the days of my earliest recollection. More clearly than I had ever seen them since they were hidden from

eyes of flesh forever, I recalled the faces of my dead father, my dead mother. Things and people, sights and sounds, which had been familiar only in my childish experience I saw and heard again. I thought of almost infant playmates, and wondered—but as we wonder in dreams—where they were now.

And as these long-forgotten memories revived, it all seemed not as though the past had come back to me, but as though I had gone back to the past, and was living there still—though I noticed that there were just three dried clots of blood, two of them larger than the third one, on the dirty hand of David Jones, as he took out his watch and looked at it.

“Five minutes!”

I was living at Beachy Bay again now. The actual sound of the harsh voice of Dr. Consett ordering me five hundred lines would scarcely have surprised me.

It was awfully kind of Curly Locks to conduct that auction in the Big Dormitory on such a rummy system of bidding, and then to offer to advance the fellows the money to pay for what they had bought, because they were all hard up. And what a brick he was about the change of that five-pound note last night!

Splendid times on Bay Island—eh, Harry? What specimens you find there for your museum under the bed!

Dear old Dan Runciman, and stout-hearted young Joe—what golden hearts they've got within, Harry, though they're so rough and weather-beaten without—white kernels in brown shells. How kind, how generous, how sympathetic, both of them! "Their home, our home," Harry—now that this "Message from the Sea" has spelt our fate without our having to wait any longer.

Seven thousand a year, Harry! You'll be a country gentleman—the Squire of Malpas—and I dare say a member of Parliament. God bless you, old fellow—always my chum, Harry, always my chum.

What! they ask me where you are? They say that I drowned you, Harry? They say that I murdered you, because I've come back without you? Don't they know I would have died to save you, Harry?

You can't say it again, Consett—you can't say it again while I hold your throat like this.

Any more news, Dan? Has the tide washed up—any more news, Joe?

I must face the world by myself now—face it with Dan Runciman's money: his and Joe's, I suppose—the money that Dan slipped into my pocket when he brushed off the earwig.

A strange meeting with a strange fellow—but I like you, Pooley. You look like a "masher," but I think you're a man. Maybe it's a good

thing for us to be reminded sometimes that a chap isn't necessarily a milksop because he dresses well, or a coward because he puts on a collar. Even a hero may occasionally wear a high hat. Look out, Pooley—there's a train ahead of us . . . we're . . .

“*Ten minutes!*”

What was the dead man's news, Pooley? “Are you the other?” he said. “If you're the two, I've brought you news of . . .” And then he died.

Yes, we'll go to the Land of Gold together.

You've spoken very plainly, Pooley, and in your own manner—but it's quite true. I have left under a cloud—left foolishly. The cloud will never be lifted from my head now, unless I find Harry and go back with him. When we've made our fortunes I shall spend all mine in finding him. But no, he's drowned: I shall never see him again.

Poor old padre! We'll look after him, Captain Arkwright.

I know he deserved it, Pooley, but I almost wish you hadn't given Jacobs such a thrashing. There's a threat in his eyes every time he looks at you.

Harry's face, Harry's voice, Harry's hand! What a leap, Harry—what a leap to me out of the white night!

Now we're all three together again—four of us now, for we've adopted a father.

We're homeward bound—but Jacobs is on board.

The *Dusky Bride* is sinking—row for the drowning padre . . . Jacobs is conscious again, Harry; but he'll never forgive that blow. He'll only wait for his chance, and when it comes he'll . . .

God! I'm in the dead past no longer, but in the living awful present, and about to be plunged into the unknown future. Jacobs has had his chance and taken it, against all of us, for this time it is *his* voice, loud and exultant—

“*Time's up!*”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE INSURRECTION.

I GRASPED Harry's hand, then Pooley's, then the padre's—then Harry's again.

I was glad that the last thing I might touch on earth should be the hand of Harry Saxon.

“As master of these here ceremonies,” said old Jones, “I now gives the word : the percession will move on to them four 'andy trees close together between here and the quarters o' them cussed monsoos. We promised 'em they should see the show, and we'll keep our word with 'em in that respeck, because we're a-going to break our word with 'em in another respeck. We none of us never meant to keep it in regard to this other respeck. ‘Truce!’ says I—with my tongue and in my 'eart—‘Truce—give us up them four and we'll hang 'em—likewise the resurrection shall be stopped.’ Now, as to the hangin', we're just about for to keep our word all correck. But as to the resurrection, we're a-going for to break it—all correck equal, for I only says that part with my tongue, and *not* in my 'eart. The resurrection

wasn't stopped, and it ain't stopped, and it ain't a-going to be stopped.

"Whatever you four wretched conwicks 'as done, you ain't succeeded, for the resurrection ain't stopped. Just think o' these here words o' mine as your legs is a-kickin' in the air free, with nothink for to tread on. My words is: the resurrection ain't stopped! 'We tried to stop the resurrection,' thinks you—when you ain't got no wind for to speak it with—'we tried to stop the resurrection, but it ain't stopped. So we're a-dyin' for nothink, after all.'

"We've laid fresh plans so artful that there won't be no mistake next time.

"The funeral percession will now wake up, and start gay. Tom Jacobs, you come here and walk alongside o' me: you and me is chief mourners. But follerers *is* allowed in this here family on this here festive occasion—and the more the merrier. So fall in, mates, behind me and Jacobs, and away we go."

The mock "procession" had moved forward scarcely half a dozen yards when he halted it to give vent to a ghastly joke, the thought of which had, I suppose, just occurred to him.

"There's a apology as we ought to make to these here mis'erable prisoners—I mean conwicks. We ain't got no music. If there was only a band on the Yighland, we'd turn it out with pleasure for to tootle the Dead March for 'em. The

musical honners must kindly be took by the mis'able conwicks for granted."

We paid little heed—no heed—to the scoffing laughter and the renewed jeers of the murderous rabble. All that we had to care about now was to try to make our peace with God during the few remaining minutes we had to live.

Our arrival at the selected spot—in full view of the French quarters, but out of range from it for all the French firearms excepting their rifles—was greeted with an ironical cheer from Ferdinand's desperadoes.

Davy Jones and several others looked very uneasy.

"I don't like being in such close quarters with the monsoos after last night," said Jones, "for all that there flag of truce of ours. Hurry up."

Jacobs walked closely up to Harry. His hands were on the very noose to tighten it when a sound from seaward woke every slumbering echo on Sunny Island.

The sound that came from the sea was the boom of a ship's gun.

With an oath which I dare not repeat—an oath so awful that I shudder to think of it—Davy Jones cried—

"The resurrection *is* stopped—the *Repub-lick-you's* come back!"

The frantic cheering that broke from the throats of the French told that they too knew—quickly

enough—the meaning of that single cannon-boom. Their man-o'-war had returned ; she was just off the coast.

Still with frantic cheers they rushed pell-mell for the beach.

The way they took soon hid them from view. Long, tangled grasses, huge flowers on tall, thick stems, and presently closely growing trees, concealed the scampering crowd, though we heard them shouting still.

“ Quick—back all to our houses ! ” cried Jones. “ We're safer there. ”

“ No, ” said Jacobs savagely ; “ we came for the hanging, and we'll carry it through. ”

“ No ; I'm off, at all events. The French are excited out o' reason, and I know 'em. Didn't you notice they carried some o' their guns with 'em ? ”

“ Bah ! ”—and again he grasped the rope round Harry's neck with one hand, and with the other that round Pooley's.

Tom Jacobs never spoke again. From the grass, the tall flowers, from the sides of the thick trees, spat tiny tongues of flame, came little puffs of smoke.

Like Jacobs, the French had seen a chance ; like Jacobs, they had taken it ; for every man of them it would seem, who carried gun or rifle had fired into the unguarded, disconcerted group of men who, equally treacherous, had attacked them in the secrecy of darkness the night before.

The shots told home.

Without a cry or groan, a moan or sigh, Tom Jacobs dropped down dead at the very feet of Harry and of Pooley. Had they not instinctively started back, his bleeding body would have touched them as it fell.

Slutch, and three men near him, dropped at the same moment.

The French didn't stop to reload, but another cheer seemed to imply that they had seen the effect of their volley before they resumed their way. Almost before the smoke had cleared, the sound of their voices, yelling still, reached us from farther off.

A strange cry—it was half a scream—from Davy Jones riveted our eyes upon him.

His hands were pressed closely to his head; but he removed them as again he screamed, and then blood gushed out from both sides.

"I'm done for—done for—done for!" he shrieked. "I says it with——"

He dropped to his knees, then on to the palms of his hands. His vacant eyes looked all round. With the action of a wounded animal he shook his head from side to side. I heard the patter of his blood-drops on the petals of the flowers.

He fell on his face, and for a few moments writhed like a stricken snake. Then he was still—forever!

Only about half the number of his followers

remained now on the spot. With the ropes still dangling from our necks, we dashed through these and gained the shelter that lay behind them, from which the French had fired.

I don't think we had any clear idea of the direction in which we ran, beyond knowing that every bound took us farther away alike from our English foes and our French ones, for the hands of both were against us.

Reaching a point near the beach above that part of it which was most familiar to us, we caught a sight of the now anchored man-o'-war. A boat was pulling from her to the shore, where stood all the welcoming Frenchmen, with a larger congregation of Kanakas.

Close to us were a few mean-looking dwellings, but our hearts rejoiced at their miserable appearance, for it proved that they were occupied by natives. Their situation was so beautiful that had they been worth stealing one set of Europeans or the other would have stolen them long ago. Panting for breath, our clothes wet through with the perspiration that rolled down our bodies, we entered the first we came to.

And there a poor untaught savage gave us shelter from the wrath of our own "Christian" countrymen. He gave us food and drink, and a resting-place—he gave us of the best he had.

All day long we never stirred outside. When night came we went on our knees—the padre

seemed to understand the motion, and knelt with us. The few words in which we offered up our thanks to the Almighty for our escape that day, and our prayer for his help to-morrow, were uttered by Harry.

Whatever the morrow might bring forth, sore would surely be our need for that help still; for we remained hemmed around with peril.

The padre slept, but Harry, Pooley, and I sat up to decide what we would do in the morning. At all risks we would leave our present shelter, and get on board the French man-o'-war, and lay our case before the captain, asking him to carry us with him when he sailed away again. Surely he would not refuse us. If he did we must do what we had thought of doing once or twice before. We must make our escape either in our own boat of the *Dusky Bride* or one of the native catamarans. Better to take our faint chance of being picked up in time, before the water and provisions we could carry were exhausted; or our even fainter chance of reaching—in time—some other inhabited land; better either chance, any chance, than to remain longer on Sunny Island now.

"We won't wait till the morning," exclaimed Harry suddenly. "There'd be more danger then of being seen and stopped. We'll board *La République* to-night, even if we have to swim for it."

Excitedly Pooley and I fell in with this idea.

We roused our Kanaka host, and—making him understand easily enough what we wanted—dispatched him to bring up a boat.

In about half an hour's time he returned with the good news that a catamaran was in waiting—and the tide just ebbing.

We woke the padre.

"Come along, padwe," said Pooley. "It's all wight. Come on."

As docilely as a child—without a question, without a thought, without the puzzled look that showed us when he was trying to think—he rose and followed us.

We seated him in the catamaran, stepped in ourselves, and the Kanaka paddled away.

The riding lights of the ship indicated her position clearly, and we shot towards her.

As we neared her the sentry hailed us—of course in French.

"Answer him, Pooley."

"No; there are too many 'r's' in the Fwench language for me, when it comes to speaking it. Answer him yourself, Hawwy."

So Harry answered the hail, saying that "Friends" were coming alongside.

Arrived alongside, the sentry put a few questions before we were allowed to mount up on deck. As the last of us got aboard he brought us all up sharp, and from somewhere behind him stepped softly forward Jules Ferdinand—a smile

on his sinister, handsome face, a cigarette held daintily between his fingers.

He spoke to us in French. At the words "New Caledonia," I shivered, for we had all heard something of the horrors of that French penal settlement.

"Since you speak my language so well"—with a polite bow—"permit me to address you in it. You are welcome—as prisoners once more. The rest of your compatriots are already on board—all prisoners, for I have denounced them because of the rising. I now go to denounce you with them to monsieur the captain, for I will no longer have a single Englishman on the island—save only the dead ones.

"You will all be taken together to New Caledonia. Allow me to condole with you that, for your own sakes, you, my guests of last night, did not insist on being hanged this morning!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST OF SUNNY ISLAND.

REPORTED to the officer of the watch, we were conducted below to join our late companions on the island, now our fellow-prisoners. Our demand to be taken at once before the captain was refused with mock politeness.

"All in good time, messieurs—you shall see enough of the captain in the morning."

"But we are English," began Harry, hotly, "and we claim——"

"Your nationality will not save you," said the petty officer to whom we were speaking.

"We'll see about that."

"In the morning, monsieur."

"Yes, in the morning, if we can't to-night."

"And in the meantime we protest against the outrage of our arrest," put in Pooley.

With a shrug of his shoulders the Frenchman informed us that we were at liberty to protest as much as we liked, but not out loud, and left us.

Our fellow-prisoners were too dejected to take

much notice of us. Whatever hopes we had of the success of our appeal to the fact of our nationality—apart from the fact that we had taken no active part in the abortive rising—it was obvious that the more ignorant followers of the dead David Jones had no hopes for themselves ; and certainly we could not help admitting that the French were sometimes capable of very high-handed proceedings. Two of the men had been to New Caledonia, and their account of the life led by the convicts there—repeated for our special benefit—sounded all the more terrible for being whispered.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of our fate, and the misery of our enforced association with our present companions, our fatigue was so great that we soon fell asleep, and slept heavily till we were aroused in the morning and offered a breakfast to which we did every justice.

An hour or two passed, all of us being in a condition of anxious expectancy the whole time, thinking every moment that we should be paraded before the captain.

At last we were made aware of a great commotion on deck. We heard the shouted orders of officers and the trampling of many feet.

Then came a sound that drowned all other sounds—a sound that startled us as the signal-gun of *La République* startled all the island yesterday.

It was the same sound—the roar of a cannon. But this time it was *not* the French man-o'-war that had fired.

Again the boom—again and again till we had counted the reports of twenty-one guns.

Then silence, broken by more orders shouted above us, and the sound of the quick movements that followed them.

Boom!

We felt the vibration of the ship as the Frenchman took up the firing—gun after gun till the same number was reached. The sentry placed over us, hitherto surly, sulky, and silent, could contain himself no longer.

“An English man-of-de-war has made herself to arrive,” he cried; “we have return her salute!”

“An English man-o'-war? Bravo!”—and the cheer that broke from Harry, Pooley, and myself was taken up by the others, the frantic endeavors of the sentry to maintain silence being quite ineffectual.

An officer came hot-footed down the gangway.

“Now's the time to repeat our demand to see the captain,” said Harry. “Here goes—back me up, Pooley, in case my French gives out.”

He stepped forward and interrupted the angry remonstrances which the officer was addressing to the sentry on account of the noise his prisoners had made. In the best French of which he was

capable, Harry repeated our protest and our demand.

The officer altered his demeanor after the first few words and listened attentively, promising, as our spokesman finished, that our representations should be laid before his chief forthwith.

A few minutes afterwards, the petty officer with whom we had conversed the previous night came to us with orders to conduct the four of us into the presence of his captain.

The French commander was in his cabin, in full dress, presumably in anticipation of the usual visit of courtesy from the commander of the English man-o'-war. He received us with a strange mixture of bumptiousness and Gallic politeness. It soon becoming clear that his English was superior to our French, we told our story in our own language, replying freely to all his subsequent questions.

"The occurrences that have been reported to me," he decided at length, "must form the subject of the strictest inquiry; in the meantime, though I shall keep the rest of your countrymen under arrest, you four are free, on condition that you give me your *parole d'honneur* not to escape."

"How could we escape?" asked Harry, bluntly. "Had there been any means of getting away we should have gone before now."

"You forget. Though you could not get to your country, your country has come to you.

On the deck of your man-o'war you would be in England."

"Twue; and a jolly good job, too," said Pooley with pleasing candor.

"If we may not be allowed to go on board the Englishman we don't want to leave this ship at all," said I. "We certainly don't want to return to the Island."

"Then consider yourselves free—on board my vessel," said the Frenchman.

We thanked him, and were about to leave the cabin when an officer came below to report that the English captain was coming alongside.

As we reached the deck, the gangway was already manned. The blades of the British blue-jackets in the boat below were all uplifted in salute, and the most ceremonious etiquette was observed by the Frenchmen as their visitor stepped on board and was escorted aft.

The visit lasted very much longer than such visits usually last.

Before it ended we were summoned into the cabin, to find the two commanders deep in consultation.

From the little we heard then and the much we heard subsequently, we learnt that in bringing before Captain Sir John Humphrey, of her Majesty's ship *Triton*, the circumstances in which he had arrested the English islanders, the French commander claimed explicitly the right to exercise

French jurisdiction. He asserted a French protectorate of the island, and we were surprised to hear Jules Ferdinand's dwelling, from which, as he pointed out, the tri-color was flying, elevated to the dignity of "Government House."

Though not prepared to concede the right claimed by M. le Capitaine Féron, Sir John was also unprepared, on the other hand, to claim the unconditional surrender of the prisoners. But in very plain and seaman-like terms he did claim the right to take part in the investigation about to be instituted, and this point he insisted on carrying.

To our personal appeal to him he paid the closest attention, only checking us when we travelled too far from the actual matter in hand.

After he had heard what he deemed sufficient, we were requested to leave the cabin, from which, before Sir John himself emerged, almost an hour must have passed.

We were delighted to be told that we were to be regarded as witnesses in the forthcoming examination and were to proceed on board the *Triton* with her captain.

He said nothing to us on the way, but on board his own ship he invited us to tell him our story fully. He listened with growing interest and the kindest sympathy.

We gathered that the visit of the *Triton* might almost be described as an accidental one; it proved an accident to which we probably owed our

liberty, if not our lives, and the means of our return home. As to the reason for the unexpected coming back of *La République* so soon after her last visit, we didn't trouble even to inquire.

The trial—if that be the proper term for the proceedings—commenced that afternoon, and lasted over the following day.

The English ringleaders, *vice* David Jones, defunct, succeeded in putting a somewhat different aspect on the charges brought against them from that sought to be justified by Jules Ferdinand.

In the end—pending, I believe, some sort of appeal which should settle the cardinal principles of jurisdiction involved—the whole of the prisoners were released.

We expected that some of them would ask to be received on board the British warship, but not one of them did. In fact, going ashore (with a jolly company of bluejackets) for the last time, on the night of their restoration to liberty, we found that the French and English, with the few American islanders had all got uproariously drunk together in the most friendly manner.

“Reshurreckshunsh be blowed!” was a “sentiment” proposed by a burly Yorkshireman who was still able to stand, and cheered to the echo by everybody who was still able to speak.

Jules Ferdinand seized hold of poor Pooley, and wept all over him. He said he was his dearest friend, and he loved him. He hiccoughed that

everybody was going to love everybody else in future, and proposed to burn a few Kanakas to celebrate the inauguration of the new *régime* of peace and fraternity.

Both men-o'-war weighed anchor the next morning, parting company a mile or two out at sea.

The *Triton* was returning to the China station; Captain Sir John Humphrey had willingly consented to carry us to Hong Kong.

As we gave a last look backwards on Sunny Island from her white deck, Pooley de Vere Pullet, with a comprehensive wave of his hand, expressed the pious hope—

“Let us twust that ewewybody there—except the compawatively wespectable natives—will cut ewewybody else's throat!”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JIM CLUCCOCK'S CHRISTMAS CARD.

WITH the closing months—the last weeks—of the “strange year” of which I have been trying to tell the “strange story,” I must quicken the pace of my narrative. But I cannot resist the temptation to halt just long enough to repeat a yarn that an old bluejacket spun us one night as we were bowling along under the soft southern stars.

“There are three things mixed up in this here yarn,” he began; “the captain of this here ship, Jim Clucock, and Jim Clucock's Christmas card.

“Now, Christmas cards is got up wonderful tasty and nice nowadays, with their worses and picters, but there ain't never been a Christmas card like poor old Jim Clucock's, nor yet ever one sent in such a extraordinary way. That's what we always called that letter—we called it Jim's Christmas card.

“We all loved him, but most all of us had a

hand in shooting him—which is what gives us wet eyes when we think about him.

“The only thing we ever had against him was his being a tee-toe-*tal*-er. But after what he done—proving as being a tee-toe-*tal*-er don’t take the pluck out of a man—’bout half of us—us who killed him—took the pledge in honor of his memory. We knowed we couldn’t do anything he’d ha liked better.

“There was about a hundred of us altogether—mostly bluejackets, with a sprinkling of marines, all from H. M. gunboat *Coquette*, on service on the west coast of Africa.

“We was in the usual sort of trouble with some of the native tribes, as had been up to their old tricks, and had got to have the old lesson taught ’em in the old way. They’d been plunderin’ and murderin’ and cannibalisin’, and deserved far worse than anything we could give ’em.

“First we had to get a long way up a long and twisting river. The *Coquette* had been built of steel, on purpose for this sort of service, and drew wonderful light. For several days she steamed up that snaky river without touching bottom, easing up now and then while we set fire to a few deserted villages. Then the water-way got too shallow even for her, and we cast anchor. The rest of the job had got to be by way of a land expedition. We made out that our gentlemen were about fifty miles inland, and on the 20th of

December (never mind the year) about a hundred of us landed from the *Coquette* and commenced the march, under Commander the Honorable John Humphrey.

“ ‘This’ll be quite a Christmas wisit,’ say Tee-toe-tal-er Jim: ‘we shall be almost in time to give ’em plums for their puddings,’ he says, looking affectionate at a gatling gun.

“ ‘We ain’t going to do fifty miles in five days, mate,’ says I, ‘through the country as we’ve got to steer through. I’ve been on these here little up-country treats before. They ain’t Sunday-school excursions.’

“ My words was true. What with jungle and swamp, swamp and jungle, we hadn’t covered more than twenty miles at the end of the third day.

“ Jim Clucock was on sentry duty that night, and that night he got carried off by the enemy. We didn’t know that any of the niggers was about, but they was, and some of ’em must have crept through the swampy grass like snakes, had Jim muzzled and down before he clapped a peeper on one of ’em, and carried him off—all so silent that ’twas only the visiting rounds discovered his absence.

“ We had a few friendly niggers with us as guides, and these was sent out with a picket, but reported they could find no trail.

“ But trail or no trail, we had plenty of proof

before morning that we was in the enemy's country, for besides carrying off Jim Clucock the blacks actually killed another sentry with a poisoned arrow.

"Every precaution was taken as we resumed our march at daybreak towards the big "village" we was making for. Our scouts made out that a small force of natives was not far ahead, and of this the evidence got plainer and plainer as the day advanced. A body of the enemy was falling back before us in the direction of what the officers called the 'objective point' of our movements. When we overtook them we might learn something of the fate of Jim Clucock.

"The country was now much more open, and on that twenty-fourth of the month we covered a good fifteen miles.

"It was a funny time, that Christmas Eve in the wild West African jungle. However, we didn't forget as it *was* Christmas Eve, and spoke of old folks at home and wives and sweethearts. A lot more poisoned arrows fell amongst us, and three black scamps were shot as they tried to make off on their stomachs. Everybody made pretty sure of a brush with the enemy in the morning.

"We had one.

"Naturally enough the beggars chose their own place. In a nasty sort of defile they let fly at both our flanks from the thick jungle on either side—

arrows and spears. Not one of their black hides could we see—we just fired at random. Suddenly our attention was took up by something in front.

“The exit of the jungle pass was held in what looked like force. And amongst the blacks there was a man as wasn't black. Not only was he white, but he wasn't a civilian white. He was a bluejacket—not only was he a bluejacket, but he was JIM CLUOCK.

“We in the leading ranks saw his face.

“It was all over in a moment.

“He held a bow and arrow in his hands, and the arrow was levelled straight on Captain Humphrey as he led us on.

“They fired one shower of arrows. Jim Clucock's came first by itself, and struck Humphrey on the breast.

“‘TRAITOR!’

“I believe that every shot of our rattling volley forward was aimed at Jim Clucock.

“He was riddled with bullets. But there was more than peace on his face when we turned him over—there was a smile there.

“The natives was all rushing pell-mell away now—the brush was over.

“We didn't know it for a minute or two—then we knew it all.

“As the arrow fell to the ground after striking Commander Humphrey, he noticed something

tied round it near the tipped end. It was a piece of white paper. As he unrolled it, he noticed that the iron arrow-head had been removed, and a blunted imitation one of wood—harmless, soft wood—put in its place. It was strange, very strange.

“ But what was wrote in pencil on the paper was stranger still—far stranger still. It was wrote by Jim Clucock—wrote the night before, wrote on Christmas Eve—and addressed to Commander Honorable Humphrey.

“ ‘ Go back, sir. The beggars surprised me and carried me off before I could make a sound. They kept me alive to get information. They got it—all lies. But I pretended to turn traitor, and the information I’ve got from them is true. Go back, sir. You are being led on on a false scent. Your guides even are false. All the tribes are hurrying to join each other IN YOUR REAR. We are only a small body acting as a decoy and to harass you. The devils in your rear, when they all join, will seize the ship first, and then wait to eat you up. So go back, sir, at once.

“ ‘ I’ve offered to fight against you to-morrow. I shall fight with this piece of paper, as I hope will be took notice of. Of course I shall get shot, but if I made a step to join you, the niggers, who watch me close, would spear me ; and I prefer to die at the hands of my shipmates.

“ ‘*A Happy Christmas to you, sir, to all the officers, and all my mates and comrades.*

“ ‘JAMES CLUOCK.

“ ‘*Christmas Eve.*’

“We only stopped for one thing—to lay him in the ground. I never saw before ’bout a hundred men cry at the same time.

“Then back we marched. We did the job in three days. We met the first batch of niggers the same day, and accounted for ’em; the next lot came in for their little bit on the second day; on the third day we sort of washed up what we could find. A week after we was at sea again.

“Commander the Honorable John Humphrey as was is a bigger swell than ever now, for besides being a full captain he’s a barrow knight. But, barrow knight and captain and swell as he is, I guess he’s kept something he wouldn’t easy part with—something as I’ve seen him look at more than once with fishy eyes—poor humble old JIM CLUOCK’S CHRISTMAS CARD.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

"WHO ARE YOU?"

ARRIVED at Hong Kong, we bade a grateful farewell to H.M.S. *Triton*, her gallant commander, her gallant officers, and many of her equally gallant crew. During the long run from Sunny Island—as we continued to call the scene of our most recent adventures—we had “made chums” at the rate of about a dozen a day.

Our next care was as to ways and means. Although we were neither penniless nor poundless, an immediate appeal to Mr. John Dexton was decided upon, for there was no kind-hearted Mr. Robison this time to get us passages to England on credit.

So Harry dispatched his telegram to Mr. Dexton. He received a message in reply requiring evidence of identity. He presented himself to the Consular authorities, and went through some formalities, after which they wired to the cautious solicitor. Three days afterwards the amply sufficient sum that Harry had asked for

was at his disposal. Within a week we were all four at sea again, once more "homeward bound."

We arrived in London "safe and sound," no incident worth recording having marked the voyage, which was as uneventful as our previous experiences had been eventful.

We left the ship on the evening she docked, and proceeded to a hotel, where we put up for the night. The next morning Harry and I, leaving Pooley in charge of the padre, hied us to the offices of Mr. John Dexon in Lincoln's Inn, and supplied him with indisputable "evidence of identity" in our own persons. He kept a whole string of impatient clients waiting while we talked and he did the listening. He made an appointment for Harry to see him again in a week's time, "when," he said, "future plans must be settled for you."

"And for my cousin Rafe, sir," insisted Harry firmly. "Where I go he goes!"

"Still chums, then, eh?" said the lawyer, with a kindly smile.

"Firmer chums than ever, Mr. Dexon. Ever and always chums, ar'n't we, Rafe?"

"Ever and always chums, Harry!" said I as heartily.

"This day week, then," repeated Mr. Dexon, rising, "at"—with a glance at his watch—"twelve o'clock. Now, what are you going to do with yourselves in the mean time?"

"We're going down to Beechy Bay," replied Harry quickly and hotly, "to give old Consett a worse wiggling than ever he gave us in the old days."

"In the old days!" They did seem old days, very old days, although fewer than three hundred and sixty-five rounds of the clock separated us from the last of them. If we reached Beechy Bay on the third day from our arrival in the Albert Docks we should reach it exactly a year from the bright, sunny morning at the end of July upon which I left it.

What a year it had been!—and its adventures were not over yet, though we thought they were.

"Of course, there has been no news of our uncle Bengough?" asked Harry as we took our departure.

Mr. Dexton shook his head.

"No," he replied gravely. "The dead send no news."

We had intended to start for Beechy Bay direct on the morrow, but this plan was varied at the urgent request of Pooley.

"Telegwam from the Honorwable Tabitha!" he exclaimed, as we re-entered the hotel, fluttering the message in the air.

We knew already that he had sent a long letter—which did *not* ask for a remittance—ashore to the dear old lady by the pilot-cutter in the Downs,

giving her a detailed account of our roving and our doings, adventures and misadventures.

"We are bringing home an adopted father," he had explained to her, amongst many other things, "and we're all going to hang together—as we nearly did on the island!"

He really was a capital letter-writer.

The telegram was from his aunt's country house a few miles from Aldershot, and conveyed what I can only call a peremptory invitation for all four of us to repair there at once.

"It weads like a Woyal invitation to go and perform at Windsor Castle," commented Pooley. "'You are commanded' style. Now, what I pwopose is this: bweak the journey with me at Aldershot to-morrow. We'll spend the night at auntie's, and all go on together to Beechy Bay the day after. I'm anxious to see her at once, partly on account of the affectionate condition of my heart, so to speak, and partly on account of the empty condition of my purse."

Harry made an instant dive into his pocket.

"No, no," said Pooley hastily; "I don't mean that. But I shall be obliged to have a talk with the Honorwable Tabitha about my affairs. So, fwom the point of view of affection and the point of view of finance combined, I say let's pay her this visit to-mowwow. If we don't, she may cut up wough."

He carried his point easily enough, for there

was no objection to his plan save what arose from my impatience to face Consett and the school. We spent the afternoon in making a number of purchases at a number of shops, the task of "wep replenishing our wardwobes," as Pooley put it, having been very imperfectly performed at Hong Kong.

Arrived at Aldershot at noon next day, we found a carriage in waiting. We hadn't driven far before we came in sight of a wide-stretching plain, covered with troops of all arms. We had never seen such a dazzling sight in our lives. The brilliant sunshine poured down on glittering miles of steel. Moving masses of scarlet shone out against the deep blue of the gunners and the nodding white plumes of cavalry. Waving pennons, flashing swords, dazzling accoutrements, all "the pride, pomp, place, and circumstance" of mimic war were presented to our unaccustomed eyes on that rolling down—a sight to stir older blood than ours. I know that mine was tingling. I noticed a more eager look in even the poor old padre's eyes than I had ever seen there before.

"It be a sham fight, sirs," said our coachman; "they be just a-going to begin. I must droive on sharp, for this here hoss he fair jump out of his skin when they big goons go hoff. I must droive round instead of across now, and keep out of soight as well as out of sound as fur as I can."

But we didn't want to be done out of the sight

like that. We jumped out of the carriage and made a hasty arrangement with the coachman to drive "round" without us. We would make our way "across" on foot, and join him in the road on the other side of the plateau, on to which we rushed helter-skelter as soon as we had made him understand.

For a time we moved from point to point with the majority of the other spectators; but presently, getting more and more excited by the occasional blasts of the bugles and the rolling of the drums, we attached ourselves, so to speak, to the quickest moving regiments, and raced ahead of everybody, of course keeping well out of the way of the marching lines of infantry, the charging troops and squadrons of cavalry, the headlong gallops of the horse artillery, and the slower movements of the grim field batteries.

But suddenly we found ourselves in a position from which we had to run our hardest to escape.

A thundered order, "Right wheel into line!" was instantly followed by such a change of formation on the part of some thousand men marching in column and echelon that we were placed directly in front of them all.

"The line will advance. Quick march!"

We took to our heels, but, all too soon——

"Charge!"

No foreign foe ever fled from advancing British bayonets at the charge faster than we did. In

dread of what might be the result of the next command, we ran till we almost reached the farther edge of the plain, where we threw ourselves on the grass.

Laughing at ourselves as heartily as our scanty breath would allow us, we were in no wise offended at the laughter that reached us from the throats of a body of dismounted cavalymen near our resting-place. They had evidently been placed out of action, for they were lolling about at their pleasure, many of them smoking. The officers, gathered in a little group by themselves, were chatting and joking. We were so close to them that the scent of their cigars reached us.

We jumped to our feet as a roar of big guns close at hand seemed to split our ears. A covered battery away to our left, but nearer the centre of the plain, had opened fire, and was playing upon another advancing mass of infantry.

"Look at the padre!"

The startled voices of Harry, Pooley, and myself rang out together—"Look at the padre!"

Was it the padre?

The face we looked at—the face with beetling eyebrows, flashing eyes, unfamiliar lines round mouth and temples—the missing lines, the missing look—was not the face we knew.

Even his complexion had changed,

We were speechless and motionless—incapable of either word or action.

He sprang to the group of cavalry officers, and laid one passionate hand on the shoulder of the chief in command, and pointed the quivering fingers of the other at the belching guns.

To him the warfare was all real, not sham, for he cried—

“Charge those guns, sir!”

The officer was speechless with indignation and amazement.

With a movement as quick as the flashing of lightning, the padre tore the sabre from the scabbard that hung from his belt, and struck him with the flat of it across the breast.

“By G——! sir, why don’t you silence those guns?”

With a furious gesture, white with passion, the officer ejaculated—

“What does this outrage mean? Who are you, sir?”

With one quick, comprehending glance at the glittering badge that told his questioner’s rank, the padre raised the sabre, still in his grasp, and flashed it through the graceful motion of a soldier’s salute to his superior before he answered—

“I am Major Gabriel Bengough!”

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEAD ALIVE!

WILL you imagine the scene that followed, and excuse me for not attempting to describe it?

By picturing it for yourselves you will probably get quite as accurate an idea of what it was like as you would from any description that I could now write.

Although my recollection of the further incidents immediately leading up to its recital is somewhat blurred, the story itself that Uncle Bengough had to tell is, for the greater portion in the very words in which he told it, as fresh in my mind as though I had only heard it yesterday.

A part he told in the midst of a group of amazed and at first incredulous officers, a part in the carriage as we continued our interrupted drive, and a part in the course of a subsequent tremendous talk in the house of Pooley's aunt, when we had all cooled down a little—a talk that lasted till long past midnight.

It will suffice for our purposes if I commence

my summary of his extraordinary experiences at the point of his departure from India for England on board the *Eastern Star*.

Chiefly for the sake of his long-trying and long-suffering liver, he had been medically advised to make a long voyage of it, and had therefore taken his passage by a slow-sailing ship instead of a fast steamer, the *Eastern Star* having been specially preferred because of the circumstance that she was bound home by the old slow route round the Cape of Good Hope instead of the new quick one through the Canal.

All went well with the *Eastern Star* till she was in the latitude of St. Helena, when the storm arose in which she foundered, with, it was supposed, the loss of every soul on board.

"A few minutes before she must have sunk a life-belt was given me, which I put on. The fate of the ship was now so certain that it occurred to me to write the message which I threw into the sea. I had scarcely sealed the bottle and hurled it overboard when something happened. I shall never know whether something fell on my head from above, whether I fell on the deck, or whether I was flung overboard as the ship gave one of her last lurches. But it is certain that either something struck my head or my head struck something. I can remember—now—the pain of the blow; I can remember—now—struggling against a strange lethargy which was yet not absolute

unconsciousness, although I think I must have become unconscious soon afterwards. When I recovered consciousness the numbness of my mind remained. Memory had gone.

“Supported by the life-belt, I was floating still. I was conscious—it seems a strange way of putting it—of the sea all round me, but I couldn’t remember what it was called. I saw the now clear sky above me, but I couldn’t understand what it was.

“Who I was, what I was, where I was, where I had been—it was all lost, all lost. I was a child again.

“I was picked up by a small boat, and taken to Ascension Isle—towards which I had been drifting and from which the boat came.

“The few people there were very, very kind and compassionate. I lived in the house of an Italian named Ladoni—he it was who called me ‘padre’ first, and soon I was known by no other name. I tried to tell Ladoni that I knew I had not always been as I was then. I think he must have learnt a good deal about me from the few papers in my possession, sodden though they must have been. Certainly he learnt more than I was able to tell him.

“Living also with Ladoni was another Englishman—not only a fellow-countryman but a fellow-soldier. As I recall him to mind now, I am certain he had been in the ranks.

“You must not forget that all sorts of things—all sorts of details—that were vague and misty to me at the time, in a way which I cannot explain, are definite and clear to me now. I know all now. It will be a good time for the doctors when I make my case known to them, as I certainly shall do. I can even remember that this man endeavored to make me understand that he had been landed on the isle in circumstances similar to my own—save, of course, for the fact of the almost unique injury to my head.

“Presently occurred something that very seldom happens at Ascension, even in these times—a ship called there. Williamson left in her for the Thames.

“I realized that he had gone. I remembered the words he said to me, over and over again, before he left: the words were in my poor paralyzed brain, but not their sense, their meaning.

“‘I know who you are—your papers have told Ladoni. I am going to England. I shall find your friends, your two nephews. They will send for you.’”

“Pooley!” I cried, “the dead man in the tunnel!”

At last we knew what would have been the news he tried in vain to tell us.

“Ladoni persevered in uttering almost the same words,” continued the Major—“‘he has

gone: he will find your friends. They will send for you. Maybe they will come for you.'

"What did it all mean? Where would he find my friends? Who were my friends?

"These were the partially formed, struggling thoughts that frequently agitated me.

"One night when they pressed upon me more than ever—and all the more painfully because of my futile efforts to grasp their meaning—I wandered from Ladoni's house and came upon his boat, lying close in to the rocky shore.

"I must find Williamson, who had himself gone to find my friends. I must go to him by the way in which he had gone to them—by way of what was straight before me, by way of what people called the sea.

"I got on the boat and cast her loose. In the morning only two things were visible—the sea and the sky. I think it must have been on the next day that a third thing was visible—the great ship that sent another boat and took me on board, where soon everybody called me 'padre' also. . . .

"It was the sight of the soldiers that did it—the old sight, the old sounds of action. Something—don't laugh—seemed to go snap inside my head. Like a flash of lightning, everything I had lost came back to me. Memory—reason—remounted her throne. Only I thought I was once more in action; and, still irresponsible for what I might do, I did what I did."

The officer he had assaulted held out his hand.

“What you have done in action, Major Bengough, is never likely to be forgotten,” he said. “What you did this morning is forgotten already”—and the generous fellow shook the hand of the old Anglo-Indian warrior a second time.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DECEMBER SUNSHINE.

WE found the coachman roaming the plain in search of us. Hours late, we resumed our seats in the carriage.

"So you two lads—two of the three who have cared for me, tended me, saved me—are my own nephews!"

"Yes, uncle."

"Well, my lads, God bless you! Hands all round once more."

The further remarks of Major Gabriel Bengough about Harry, Pooley, and myself, we all three—chums still—consider too eulogistic for publication.

Pooley's aunt was waiting to receive us in the drawing-room.

She rose as we entered—Pooley first, Harry and I close behind him, and Uncle Gabriel last, towering inches above the tallest of us. He bore himself now with all a soldier's erectness of carriage.

Just as Pooley was about to receive her em-

brace, she caught sight of the soldierly figure, the soldierly face, just inside the closing door. And in such a funny voice she cried, "Gabriel!" at the instant that uncle cried "Tabitha!"

The next moment Pooley's aunt fainted. She fainted, but she didn't fall, because uncle held her in his arms so tightly. We saw him bend his head; his grizzled moustache twitched as he kissed her forehead.

"There's more in this than meets the optic," whispered Pooley. "Let's skedaddle out of the room!"

Of course we did so, so it was not till shortly afterwards that we knew that years ago—long years ago, in the May-time of their lives—Pooley's aunt and our uncle had loved each other. But the lives that were to have been united had been divided—a cloud had darkened all the sunshine—each had been made to misunderstand the other by a false friend of both. And one had gone abroad and tried to forget, while the other had remained at home, her lonely heart all the lonelier for knowing that it was no use to try.

The summer of their lives had gone; even the autumn had passed, the winter time was close at hand; nay, it had come, for had not already its first snows fallen on their heads? But meeting each other as they had met just now, both were carried back to the spring-time of their lives and the

spring-time of their love in the rush of emotion that made a temporary oblivion of all the time between.

And it came about that in December was to return, in shortened measure, the sunshine that had been darkened in May.

Pooley's aunt fainted five more times in the course of the evening, the whole of which was taken up in telling her—with many skips—what I have now almost finished telling you.

Previously Major Bengough—as masterful now as he had been docile before—had dispatched a peremptory telegram to Mr. Dexton, requiring him to meet us at Aldershot in the morning.

“There's no need for you to delay your journey to Beechy Bay, boys, on account of a civilian. Dexton shall come with us, and be told what he is to do on the way.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEARDING THE LION IN HIS DEN.

“**B**LESS us and save us, Joe! here’s our investment come back!”

The voice was the voice of old Dan Runciman speaking to his son Joe.

They had run full tilt against us as we walked from the station on the well-remembered road to the school.

“And—Lord help us!—here’s Master Harry, what got downded! Both of ’em come back together!”

One of the huge outstretched red hands belonged to Dan, the other to Joe. Neither hand had to wait long for the clutch of mating fingers, and Pooley was only waiting his turn.

“Come on, Dan! come on, Joe!”

“God bless us!” was all they could say.

I talked to Dan and Harry talked to Joe as we all proceeded towards Beechy Bay Academy for Young Gentlemen; but I don’t think either of them realized for long enough anything beyond the fact that we had both returned.

Dan had no coat on over his fisherman's jersey, so there was nothing for me to brush off it.

"Give us your hand again!" I exclaimed, as we halted for a moment outside the school-house gates.

"Aye, aye, Master Rafe: willing *and* free *and* hearty. Hulloo, sir!"—as he held out a very thin piece of paper that rustled between his fingers—"what's this?"

"The earwig you brushed off my coat, Dan."

"Now then," cried Uncle Gabriel, "what's the word of command? Are we all to beard this small lion in his den together?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Every one of us," I chimed in. "No, no, Dan, no hanging back! No skulking, Joe! *We* ask you in, and *we'll* see you safe out."

"That's spoke fair," laughed Joe.

"Fair it is," said Dan, with a chuckle.

"It stwikes me, Wunciman"—I needn't say who was speaking—"that if you and Joe don't come in, you'll miss a tweek such as you'll never have a chance of seeing again."

"Lead the way, then, gennelmen, and we'll follow close in your wake."

In single file we strode up the narrow lane that led to the garden entrance of the "Big Room"—I first, Harry behind me, then Pooley, next the impatient Major, followed by Mr. John Dexton, Dan and Joe bringing up the rear.

It was a grand scene, that

“ . . . Last scene of all,
That ends this strange, eventful history.”

It was breaking-up day—every boy was in his place. Job Consett and the under-masters were in theirs on the platform. We burst in upon them all.

We were just in time; the usual address of dismissal for the holidays was on the point of being delivered.

I flatter myself that we varied the final order of the intended proceedings considerably.

Though masters and boys alike sprang from their seats, no one tried to stop us.

We reached the edge of the platform, and I jumped on to it with a single bound.

I turned first to my old schoolfellows.

“ You know what some of you—you, Locks, and others—suspected me of doing with Harry Saxon. *There he stands!* ”

I thrust aside a master who tried to push me back, and walked a few steps closer to The Patient One.

“ Dr. Consett, you know what you accused me of doing with Harry Saxon. *There he stands!* ”

The boys had found their voices. I never expect to hear such cheers again.

Curly Locks had joined me on the platform, and was wringing my hand off.

Of all that crowded roomful only one remained calm—Mr. John Dexon. In the midst of the babel he ascended to Consett's side, and spoke quickly but quietly to him.

Whatever the solicitor said, the pedagogue was incredulous. With an unmistakable look towards Uncle Bengough he let fall distinctly the word "Impostor!" adding, "Such a case has never been heard of."

"Impostor, sir!" roared the Major. "Do you apply that term to me? By Jupiter! sir, let me get at you, and I'll see if I can provide the doctors with a case of similar results from a similar cause by cracking every bump on your head against the wall till I smash in the right one!"

Gradually—but very gradually—the hubbub subsided.

"Have you anything more to say, Rafe?"

"No, sir."

"You, Harry?"

"No, uncle."

"Has anybody anything more to say? Because, if not, we'll clear out. Has anybody anything more to say?"

"Yes, I have."

"Oh, *you* have, have you? Out with it, then, sharp."

Job Consett shrank back alarmedly as the Major faced him, but plucked up courage to get rid of what was on his mind.

"You owe me a bill, sir. I have a bill against you on account of these two lads. It amounts to——"

"Not another word, sir—not one word. I know how you treated these two nephews of mine. I know all, or I shouldn't be here with them to-day. Dexton, pay this man for me, will you? Now—on the spot. Have you got your cheque-book with you?"

"Yes, Major."

"Then pen and ink here, somebody."

The cheque was made out, signed, and delivered "on the spot."

The address for that particular dismissal was never delivered. The boys dismissed themselves without it, for they swarmed out after us.

Harry and I were so plied with questions that our tongues began to grow weary with answering.

Caps were thrown high in the air, and cheers rose higher than the caps, as we passed out of the gates, "Bravos" and "Hurrahs" following us all down the road.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHUMS STILL.

THE host of the Blue Anchor was staggered when he received, from our gallant uncle himself, that order to prepare dinner for five. Such a dinner had never been ordered in Beechy Bay before.

He was staggered, but he bore up. He did his best, and it was a very good best. He acquitted himself like a man and a landlord.

"When I have anything to say," remarked Uncle Gabriel, as he lit a big cigar at the conclusion of the repast, "I like to say it. As I've got a good deal to say to-night, I'll start saying it at once.

"First, about Westwood, and that will of mine. By-the-by, Mr. Dexton, don't forget to destroy it the instant you get back."

"Probate has been granted," said the solicitor.

"Confound the probate, sir! Didn't I tell you this morning——"

"I understand your wishes, Major Bengough,"

interrupted Mr. Dexton calmly, "and everything shall be done in accordance with them."

"Thanks—and excuse my impatience. I always was impatient, and a soldier's life in India always seems to have a peppery effect on one's disposition. It strikes me that I've got something else back besides my memory—and that's my liver, confound it!"

Nobody contradicting the probability of this suggestion, he continued the remarks from which he had broken off.

"About Westwood. The place belonged to the Bengoughs for hundreds of years, passing intact from father to son for generation after generation—intact, mark me, after the good old fashion. We only lost it because at last that good old fashion was broken and the estate was split up. More splittings up followed the first, until every Bengough had a little and no Bengough had much. All the time the family was losing its standing in the county, and its political power and importance in consequence. In the end, every acre passed into the hands of strangers. All my life, saying nothing about it, I had one absorbing ambition—to buy every acre of it back. I succeeded. The day came at last when the whole of the old place belonged to a Bengough again—belonged to me.

"I made a will—a hasty one—on the very day I left Bombay.

"There was nobody to leave Westwood to but one of my two nephews—mark me, Dex-ton, to *one* of them; the whole to one, for I was determined that it should never be split again.

"I knew nothing of either of 'em—had never seen either of 'em—didn't care a fig for either of 'em. The only principle of selection I could be guided by was the good old hereditary idea of 'land to the eldest.' I suppose I'm too much of a Tory for these times and this country; however that may be, you know what my will was.

"But now it won't do. Confound it! it won't do at all. I can't have my friend Rafe here left out in the cold when my days are over. He put Friendship before Fortune, Honor and fair fame before Gold; when I deliver up my sword to the grim conqueror he must have his whack of the loot I shall leave behind me."

"Bravo, uncle!" cried Harry.

"That's right, lad—that's the spirit. I won't split up the estate, but I'll devise some way by which both of you shall benefit by it when I've done with it. In the mean time choose your own careers, and I'll find you the means to pursue them.

"As for this stuttering jackanapes of a friend of yours here. . . ."

Pooley bowed politely, for there was no mistaking the kindness of the smile on the Major's face.

“As for him, he never need be short of a ‘wemittance’ when he wants one, for—out of his clothes—he’s one of the best. And I may as well say now as at any other time that his aunt and I are going to be married. We thought to live our lives together a long time ago. As it is, at least we’ve made up our minds not to die apart.

“Now get out of the room, you three youngsters. Confound it! don’t start thanking me; I hate it. Get out of the room. I want to talk business with Mr. Dexton.”

Pooley de Vere Pullet never wanted any more “wemittances” from anybody, for before he had time to get hard up again—after that visit to his aunt—his distant kinsman the baronet died, and most unexpectedly left him quite sufficient to live—and dress—on.

Major Gabriel Bengough is Squire of Westwood yet—long life to him.

Pooley’s aunt—the Squire’s wife—is well—long life to her.

Harry Saxon, our old uncle, Pooley, and I are all chums still. And Pooley’s aunt “is another.”

THE END.

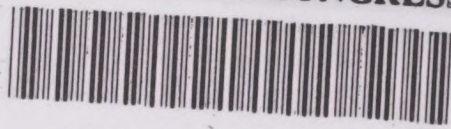
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